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## Irwin's Story





With gratitude  
to my sister Susan for her help with the editing  
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I suppose one of the dangers associated with putting together an autobiography is that there's the possibility that one can sound too self-serving, too nostalgic and probably boring to the listener. Keeping that in mind I'm going to make an attempt to avoid these sins and proceed to tell you an extemporaneous\* account of what I remember of my childhood up to the age of 15 when I arrived on the shores of the United States.

My name is Irwin, Irwin Grossman. I was born on April 7, 1933 just about the time that the Nazis came to power in Germany. I was born in a small town in Eastern Slovakia called Košice in Slovak, Kassa in Hungarian and Kassua in German. We had a population of about 60,000 at the time of my birth which meant that it was the second largest city in Slovakia exceeded only by Bratislava. It was a medieval town founded originally in Roman times and subsequently resettled by various national groupings - mostly Hungarians, Slovaks, Bulgars, and Jews. The community centered around the old town which consisted of Main Street and the Gothic cathedral built in the 1300's. The cathedral was referred to as the "Dome" because it had a huge dome structure on top of its tower. It was a very awesome structure and as a child I remember continually wanting to go and see what's inside. Unfortunately my Father would not allow me to do so because it was a Catholic church and we were Jews. On one occasion though, I managed to peek in through the open door of the cathedral.

The town is situated at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains, with cold winters and cool summers at the latitude of Seattle without the benefit of an ocean front. As a result the climate is quite severe.

My Father was born in Lastoc, Lastovce in Slovak, a small village which I am unable to find on a map after many attempts. According to his Birth Certificate his parents were tenant farmers (földbérlo) in the proximity of that village. He was the youngest of ten children most of whom I remember as a child. The oldest two brothers, Eddie and Isadore were living in America, where they had immigrated about 1910. He also had a sister, Helen, living in New York who was married to

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\* These notes are based on audio tapes recorded in 1992, completed and transcribed in 1995, and lightly edited in 1996.







Julius Engel. Some of his other brothers, Moritz and Wilmos, lived in small towns in Slovakia. As for his sisters, one of them lived in Tokaj and several others lived in the proximity in small villages. According to my Mother, the family was very protective of my Father, more so than of the others because he was the youngest.

When World War I rolled around and my Father was about 23 years old, it was decided that he go to live in Switzerland so that he can avoid the service in the Austro-Hungarian Army. I suppose in those days there were quite a number of young men that were doing the same thing in Switzerland. As a result, the economic situation for these young men was difficult. He ended up selling watches door to door, and as my Mother told us he almost died one winter for lack of proper shelter and food. Were it not for some kind woman he might have perished.

As the War ended he returned to his home country, by this time Czechoslovakia. As you may recall Czechoslovakia was created artificially out of Hungary -- that is the Slovakian portion of Hungary -- and Germany, namely Moravia and Bohemia, and was thus put together as a new democratic state. Both Bohemia and Moravia were Slavic entities so the net result was that Czechoslovakia was entirely Slavic.

The new Czechoslovakia looked very promising at the time because it was truly democratic, and the founder, Tomas Masaryk, had a very good international reputation. There was some friction between the Czechs and the Slovaks, as the Czechs tended to dominate the country. To this day it seems that about 70% of the gross national product does come out of the Czech portion of Czechoslovakia. The Slovaks were primarily agricultural whereas the Czechs were more industrialized. Be that as it may, my Father settled in Kosice anticipating that the town will grow and he'd have an opportunity to establish a successful business.

The business enterprise he selected was wholesale/retail paint and related supplies such as turpentine, plaster and affiliated building materials. He acquired a partner in the early days. As a result the name of the business was Grossman & Company. As time went on he bought out his partner. It's not clear to me as to why this happened, but nevertheless he did do so and he became the sole proprietor by the mid-twenties. By this time he reached the ripe old age of 35 and thought it time to get married and start a family. As my Mother tells it, he was engaged to a woman for a short period and broke up. I'm not sure why they broke up. But after that my







Father engaged a matchmaker, Shadchun in Yiddush, to see if he can meet an appropriate woman to marry.

Enter my Mother. My Mother was born in Ungvar or Uzhorod, about 100 kilometers northeast of Kosice. The town had a population of about 15,000 at the time of my birth. My Mother was born in 1906, coincidentally in the same month and date as my Father --January 28th. My Mother was the middle child of seven children. She had an older brother who emigrated to America after World War I. She had two older sisters, two younger brothers and one younger sister. Her Mother died in childbirth. As a result they where without their mother at quite a young age. My Grandfather Joseph Hillman, remarried and he had one more daughter with the second wife. My mother was about 21 when she met my Father and married him when she was 22. Before marriage she had ambitions to go to the University in Prague, but unfortunately because of economics, she was not able to do so. She had a very good education as a graduate of gymnazium which was an excellent high school in existence at the time. She was a first class student, and she would have been admitted to the University were it not for the fact that the family decided that University funds should be reserved for a male instead of for a female. Thus Francis, who was her younger brother went to Charles University in Prague. Ultimately he became a physician.

After graduating high school my Mother remained at home. In those days it was just not possible for a middle class young woman to do anything but housework, crocheting, and knitting and things of that sort. There were two reasons for this. First, the availability of jobs outside the home were limited. Secondly, it was simply frowned upon to have a middle class girl from a Jewish family work outside the home. It's not that housework was not a challenging experience. In those days the maintenance of a household was a monumental task. To run the household properly the housewife had to address herself to at least two major items of necessity. They were the food supply and the availability of fuel. All homes were heated by either wood or coal. There was no natural gas or oil available which meant that one had to plan for accumulation of firewood or coal for the winter well prior to the need. Fresh food stuffs were not available in the winter either except on rare occasions which meant that one had to accumulate all food for the entire year during the summer season. That meant preserving, cooking, drying and preparing various food stuffs for the long winter season.



Early, as a young child, I had occasion to observe my Mothers activities in this area. When I was about four or five I would always accompany her to the market place which usually occurred on Thursdays. The peasants would come into town meet at a local square and set up an open air farmers market. At the market one would have a variety of stuff available, starting from live chickens to fruits, vegetables and firewood as well. My Mother would start in early summer selecting certain items which would be suitable for preservation for the winter. She would buy potatoes for example, take them down to the cellar and bury them in a sand box. This enabled the potato to remain unfrozen during the winter without sprouting. She also would buy raspberries, tomatoes, peaches, pears, cucumbers etc., prepare them in the kitchen as preserves. She would even prepare mushrooms by cutting them up in small, thin slices, putting them out to dry in the pantry threaded on strings. She had a pantry that was a good sized room. It was always locked to assure that her inventory was not diminished by unknown individuals.

The meat supply consisted primarily of chicken and geese. Chicken fat, goose fat and butter were the main source of shortening. There was very little vegetable oil available. Whatever there was, such as olive oil was imported and quite expensive. The net result was that everything was cooked with fat. Butter, which was quite expensive, was not always available. My Mother would do all her own baking. She made her own bread, including Challah, and various pastries. We ate out very infrequently. As a matter of fact the only times I can remember eating meals in a restaurant was when we were on a trip or at a wedding or when we got a special treat by going to a local pastry shop. The restaurants were not that good. They were quite expensive, and one could never be sure that they were kosher.

My Father was raised Orthodox. We kept kosher, we separated the dishes, we observed all the Holidays and went to the Synagogue on a regular basis, Friday nights, Saturdays and of course on the Holidays. My Mother was a very strict kosherut observer. I recall on occasions when the chicken was brought home from the Shochet and my Mother would prepare it to make it kosher. She would salt it and let it stand for a prescribed period of time and then she would examine the intestines of the chicken. Whenever she found something irregular, she would send the maid with the chicken to the Rabbi to establish whether there was a problem with the chicken being acceptable as kosher. And of course she would





always be quite concerned about this. Chickens were quite expensive and if the Rabbi declared them nonkosher, it would be a total loss to us.

I remember as a child of about four or five, Friday morning activities in the kitchen would start very early. My Mother would prepare the dough for the Challah and let it sit until until it rose. Then she would braid it into Challah shape. She would prepare streudel occasionally with poppy seeds or walnuts and she would also make some delkels, a Danish made with cheese. On occasion she would take the Challah to the local baker who would bake it and we would pick it up Friday afternoon before the Temple. She would also prepare Cholent, the traditional meal for the Sabbath. It consisted primarily of beans, barley and some meat, usually beef. She would prepare it in a large pot, cover it with a brown paper and tag it with her name. When the maid would pick up the Challah at the end of the day on Friday, she would drop off the Cholent. It would then be placed into the hot oven at the bakery overnight. On Saturday after Temple, it would be ready to be picked up from the baker, well cooked and ready to eat as the Sabbath lunch meal.

Getting back to the story of my Father and Mother getting married, as I am told the wedding took place in Ungvar and they honeymooned in Vienna. After Vienna, my Father decided to visit some of his suppliers in Germany, one of which was I.G. Farben. In those days I.G. Farben was the forefront in all chemical products including paints. As it happens, the Germans, in the mid 19th century. became predominant in the chemistry of paint and they were able to manufacture just about any color pigment. In addition, they were also in the forefront of medicine, physics and chemistry. My Father spoke a perfect German. His education consisted primarily of being instructed by a live-in tutor. He did not have a formal education as such, but he did speak perfect German and he was also able to write the old German type Script. German helped him in his business a great deal. When they returned to Kosice after their honeymoon, my Mother's younger brother, Armin, came to Kosice to participate in my Father's business in the hopes of getting trained as an associate. That unfortunately didn't work out. There is a very tragic story about what happened to that young man after he left Kosice and returned to his Father's house.

In January 1930, my older brother Otto was born and of course there was a great deal of joy in the family (I don't remember it personally because I wasn't there.) I was





born about three years later, in 1933. My earliest recollection start when I was quite young, lying on my Father's chest on the couch listening to the radio. In those days radios were not commonplace. 1933 was long before TV or transistors or even good quality vacuum tubes. As it happened, my Father had received an excellent short waved radio receiver as a gift from his brother Isidore in America. It was a Philco, I believe, and it enabled us to listen to all kinds of foreign broadcasts. This fact became quite important as time went on, but in the very early thirties he was using it for entertainment purposes. He was able to tune in on some of the Middle Eastern stations and he was especially fond of the Turkish and Arabic music. We would also listen to the two Hungarian stations out of Budapest and to Vienna, Berlin, Paris and of course, London. All these foreign stations were quite accessible and some of them had Hungarian language broadcasts as well.

My Father was somewhat of a daydreamer. He liked to lie on the couch and while listening to the music, he would be kind of self absorbed. I suppose in those days, listening to foreign broadcasts he was beginning to consider that perhaps he should be thinking about immigrating either to Palestine or the United States. However it didn't appear to him to be a pressing matter and as a result though he was toying with the idea, he wasn't doing anything concrete about it. He was a very gentle man, as I recall. I would spend a lot of time with him when he was in this daydreaming mood, he would pinch my cheeks and he would hug me in a very gentle way. He was not much of a talker. He was more an introvert.

As I grew older I became more aware of some of the Grossman relatives of ours, especially Uncle Moritz and Aunt Sari and their daughter, Lilly who was about 12 to 14 years old at the time. They would visit us on a periodic basis. They lived in a small town called Secovce which was about 50 kilometers or so directly east of Kosice. It was an exciting time for me when they came visiting. Uncle Moritz owned a very nice looking modern Skoda automobile. It was an exciting thing to ride in that automobile. Whenever I would hear that they were coming to visit, I would get up bright and early, stand by the window for hours until they arrived in front of our house. It was also exciting because Aunt Sari was a real live- wire. The minute she walked into the house there was a lot of activity, talking, excitement about shopping and all kinds of things happening. They had a Chauffeur who was actually one of our cousins, Miklos, who now lives in London. My Father also had an automobile which was a somewhat older, a Tatra. I think it was probably made



in the twenties. My Father did not drive the car. He also had a chauffeur who would handle and maintain the car. He used the car in his business, as he had travelling salesmen who would cover the countryside by automobile. The railroads were not too efficient in those days. To get to the villages, the best way to get around was by either wagon or automobile. We would also use the automobile for outings from time to time. It was always a terribly exciting time for me to ride in these automobiles.

We would also get visits from family members on my Mother's side especially Mariska. Zara came from America with her two boys, Jerome and Norman, on or about 1937 and stayed with us. My Mother's brother, Francis, who by now was a graduate of Charles University and was a practicing dentist in Prague, would come and visit us also. And of course, Grandpa Hillman would come and see us as well.

On or about the middle of 1939 I noticed that the Grossmans from Secovce stopped coming to visit. At the same time I began to hear of certain developments which implied a drastic political change in the winds. It turned out that the Hungarians made a deal with the Germans, as the Germans reconfigured Central Europe. To be specific, the Munich Pact resulted in the breakup of Czechoslovakia.

Let me spend a little time on this because it was a crucial development. When Czechoslovakia was created, part of the Bohemian portion included a very large German minority, the so called Sudeten Germans. There was a lot of friction between the Czechs, who were Slavs, and the Sudeten Germans. It was alleged by the Nazis that this large German minority was mistreated by the Czechs and, as a result, they demanded that the Sudetenland be ceded to Germany. The Sudeten Germans of course were all in favor of this. As they looked across the border to Mother Germany they saw that the unemployment rate was almost down to zero, whereas, it was 20% in their midst in Czechoslovakia. So, when the Munich Pact was signed, the Sudeten German lands were to be ceded to the German Reich. In practice this meant that the rest of Bohemia was no longer economically, politically, or militarily viable. Hitler knew this well, soon occupied Prague, and ultimately the rest of Bohemia/Moravia. That being the case, Czechoslovakia ceased to exist as an independent entity. The Nazis decided that they will give the Slovakian portion an independent status.





The Slovak government was established under the leadership of two Catholic Priests by the name of Hlinka and Tiso. These people were strong Nazi collaborators, extremely anti-semitic. But as a price for getting their independence the Slovaks were required to give up a portion of Slovakia to the Hungarians. And of course the Hungarians would join the Axis in exchange for this concession. Not only did the Hungarians receive a part of Slovakia, the southern portion or the underbelly, where Kosice, our town, was located, but they also got part of Transylvania from the Rumanians. A piece of Serbia was later added as Yugoslavia was invaded by the Nazis. The net result was that our home Kosice became part of Hungary. and its name was changed to Kassa.

As far as our situation was concerned it appeared that nothing much had changed. Kosice had always had a very large Hungarian population and Hungarian was used extensively in business, in public as well as at home. We spoke exclusively Hungarian. My Mother spoke Yiddish to her Father but even that wasn't that frequent. My Father rarely spoke Yiddish. He spoke German or Hungarian so the actual impact was minimal except for the fact that our cousins on the Slovakian side were no longer able to come to see us. They now had to cross an international border. In those days, crossing any international border in Central Europe was a major undertaking.

As I recall, as the Hungarian authorities took over, there was a ceremonial parade on the Main Street in Kassa. I saw Admiral Horthy, the Regent of Hungary, enter the city on a white horse and parade under a makeshift Arch de Triumph. The population was elated, and as I recall, we weren't particularly unhappy about the event either. We didn't think that this was something that would be of any concern to us.

At this point I'd like to say a few words about Admiral Horthy. Horthy was a Naval Officer in the Austrian-Hungarian Navy during World War I. He came into power after the failure of the Bolshevik revolution in Hungary. The Bolshevik revolution, lead by a Jewish bookkeeper named Bela Hun, succeeded in seizing power in Budapest. For a short period Hungary was a socialist Republic not unlike what happened after World War II. But the Bolsheviks made a mess of things and within about a year, after committing a number of atrocities and attempting to invade Czechoslovakia, the revolution fell apart. Admiral Horthy was brought in





to do away with the Bolshevik rule and to re-establish the Hungarian Monarchy. But, as it happened, there was no pretender to the throne at this time. As a result Horthy remained the Regent of Hungary until such time as a Hungarian King could be crowned. I gather, Horthy was supported by the British as they were instrumental in overthrowing the Bolshevik regime. The population was, for the most part, anti-Bolshevik and Horthy did not have a difficult time of it. The Civil War was not a significant war and by 1920 or thereabouts, Horthy was in complete control.

He established a parliamentary system of government. The Parliament represented four political parties. There was the Landholders Party, the Democratic party, the Conservative Liberal party and one other. Horthy was the dominating personality and he was able to put through most legislation at will. He was not an outright Anti-Semite but there were pressures on him which resulted in certain decrees. Some of these consisted of setting up a quota system, "Numerus Clausus." This required that Jews not constitute more than a certain percentage of any profession. Admission to Gymnazia and Universities were limited to a specific number of Jewish students.

As the Hungarians acquired new territory, especially the territory to the south, out of Serbia, there were rumors of atrocities committed against Jews. These rumors were later found to be factual and the Horthy government did intend to prosecute the perpetrators.

Parenthetically, the Jewish population in Hungary at this time was of the order of 800,000. This would include the Jews of Transylvania, of southern Slovakia as well as the "Ujvidék" Jews. These were the Jews who were acquired when Yugoslavia fell apart.

The Jewish community in Hungary is one of the oldest in Europe. It's roots go back about 1,900 years. Only Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria have older Jewish populations. The population of Poland, by comparison, would be about 800 years old. The Jewish communities of Bohemia are also quite old but not as old as the one in Hungary. This means that Jews have lived in Hungary since before the Hun invasion (the Huns invaded about 500CE) and the Jews were present just about the time of the beginning of the Common Era. There is an interesting theory about the origin of the Jews in Eastern Europe. The claim is that they are the descendents of the Kazar's



who were converted to Judaism about 400 - 500 Common Era. This would mean that some Jews in Hungary were pre-Kazar. The question then arises whether these people converted to Judaism during the Roman period or were migrants from Greece and Italy. It's an interesting question and I'm not sure that there is an answer. It seems that the Hungarian Jews generally spoke Hungarian in preference to Yiddish or German. It was a very old community and they are more Magyar than Jewish in some respects.

The Hungarian Jewish population was concentrated in cities although a large portion of them did live in the countryside. Budapest was 25% Jewish and was often referred to as Judapest. The major Jewish communities were Ungvar, Munkacs, Kosice, Debrecen, Pecs, etc., all had good percentages of Jewish populations. The Jews in the countryside of course were mostly tenant farmers and small merchants. Typically, in a village in Hungary or Slovakia, for that matter probably Poland as well, the tavern owner, the mill owner and the distillery owner was usually a Jew. The main reason of course being that they were frequently not permitted to own land so the only way to subsist would be through these business activities. The professions were subsequently dominated in certain areas by Jews, There's no question about that. A very large percentage of doctors and lawyers were Jews; not so much engineers. In the 19th century at least, they did gravitate toward the hard sciences, mostly physics and chemistry but there again the numbers were smaller than in the medical and legal fields.

The Hungarians of that era produced quite a few good scientists. The ones that come to mind would include, for example, Szentgyorgyi, who discovered Vitamin C by analyzing Paprika. Paprika is one of the export products of Hungary. We also had people like Szilard and Teller. These happened to be Jews who contributed to the development of the Atomic bomb. Von Neuman, a great mind, is considered the father of modern computers. Von Karmann was a brilliant aerodynamicist and thermodynamicist.

With the advent of the Hungarian annexation, things began to change, although ever so slightly. My Father was required to obtain a Hungarian Business permit (Ipar) to remain in business. This permit was granted only to Jews who could prove that they were citizens of Hungary. That required proof of place of birth. Since my Father was born in Lastoc, which was part of greater Hungary (pre World War I) he





was granted citizenship on that basis. As I recall he made several trips to Budapest trying to straighten out his citizenship. As soon as he received his certificate, he had it photostated so that he could carry one copy in his wallet at all times. The original he placed in his safe as it was considered to be a most valuable document.

In 1938 my Mother gave birth to my younger brother Alexander, or Sanyi as we used to call him. He met a very tragic end in 1944. In September, 1939, I became of school age, got enrolled in the local public school. My first grade was uneventful except for one incident which resulted in me switching schools. One day, as I walked to school (the school was walking distance to our home) and as I approached I noticed there were quite a number of Hungarian soldiers standing about, being temporarily quartered in the school. As I went through the main entrance, I noticed a soldier leaning against the doorpost. He smiled at me and he asked me whether I was Jewish. I responded without hesitation, at which time he pulled his hand out of his pocket and stuck a large piece of bacon in my mouth. "Here Jew, have some bacon." I proceeded to class, but on going home that evening I related the incident to my Mother. My Mother didn't make an issue of it but I noticed that she exchanged some very serious glances with my Father. As I was able to put it together, my Father originally insisted that I be enrolled in a public school because he felt that since we are living in a society dominated by Gentiles, I should be able to get used to the real world and get along with them. My Father had a Spartan outlook on life and he didn't believe in pampering us in any way. I happened to agree with him on that. In this particular situation however, since we had the option of going to a Jewish grammar school it was decided that my second grade would be in that school.

When I say Jewish grammar school I mean that the school was accredited and was run by the Neologue Jewish community but we received a secular education. It was an excellent school and I made some very good friends who became very close to me. Some of us were inseparable from age seven on. I would continually spend time with three of the boys that I met in that school. My closest friend was Singer Peter who was the son of a local attorney. Kaufman Laci and Berger George, who was also in my class, were my other close friends. Peter was a very bright boy and we had a lot in common. We would spend a great deal of time together after school, after homework, talking about all kinds of things including world affairs, politics, science, you name it. I miss him to this day! They all perished in the Holocaust.





Peter introduced me to sports. One summer one of his older cousins from another town showed up. He knew about soccer and the soccer teams throughout the country and he started taking us to soccer matches which were held at the outskirts of the city. All of a sudden we became interested in soccer players and their performance and watching the professionals and semi-professionals. We would play soccer ourselves on the street. We would kick some ball around here and there, we'd set up goals with a couple of rocks on either end and we'd go to it with whoever were available or walking by. We were not much into other sports. There was ice skating in the wintertime but we never really participated. We would watch people play tennis in the "liget" which was the kind of the Central Park of the city. It was not open to the public so we would press our noses against the chain link fence and watch people play on the clay courts.

Peter and I were both very good students, head of the class, a little bit competitive but in a very friendly way. The teachers were excellent, very dedicated and devoted to teaching us and of course they kept us on our toes. There was a lot of homework and constant drilling and testing about the subject matter and so we had to be prepared at all times. Even in those days in a Jewish school we had juvenile delinquency. We had students who were repeaters, boys who would not pass one or two of the subjects and would have to repeat the whole year. These boys would usually end up in the back rows and would misbehave from time to time. They were real discipline problems. I was one of the smallest kids in the class, and of course, other kids, especially the bad kids, would pick fights with me and threaten me. Periodically some of these older delinquents would approach me and offer to protect me in exchange for my lunch. Since I wasn't eating very much in those days and since I felt sorry for these kids anyway, I would give them at least part of my lunch every day and would get some "protection." But from time to time I would find that these same kids would pick on me anyway. In one particular incident, I was sitting in the class with the teacher lecturing and behind me sat one of these delinquents. He would start kicking me while the teacher was lecturing. After about five or six minutes of this, I lost my temper, I got up, turned around and started hitting him over the head with both my fists. The teacher stopped lecturing and was taken aback. After realizing what was going on, he encouraged me to continue beating up the culprit. To make a long story short, that kid never picked on me again. I was very thankful to my teacher who knew that I was well behaved and I would not have done this were it not absolutely necessary.



Peter and I also attended the same Temple. There were three Temples in Kassa. Two were Orthodox and one Neologue or Reformed. There were two Jewish communities side by side. They had a tendency to frown on each other.

When I was in second grade in 1940 things began to happen to Jews in the neighboring countries and we heard some very ugly rumors. They were discussed in the Temple and as my Father would be told something, I would ask him for details. He would invariably say, "Later, later". He wouldn't comply and, of course, "later" would never come. But as I would meet with my friend Peter later, he would tell me a little bit more about certain rumors, specifically, the rumors which had to do with the Jews of Silesia, Galicia and Slovakia. Apparently these areas became the dumping-ground for Jews who were found by the Hungarian authorities and were unable to prove Hungarian citizenship. Rumors had it that they were often picked up in the middle of the night with nothing but clothes on their backs and were dumped in border areas. Galicia was at that time part of Rumania but it was disputed by the Russians. Silesia was part of Poland. It had a very large Jewish population which the Poles were mistreating. This was before the German invasion. By this time, Jews from the neighboring countries started to come into Hungary seeking refuge on a kind of an underground railroad.

As I recall, about this time my Father befriended a refugee German Jewish family by the name of Offner. Dr. Offner was an engineer in Germany who escaped from the Nazis with his wife, son and mother-in-law. He spoke only German and had no legal papers, no legal status. As a result he was unable to find gainful employment in Kassa. The Jewish community supported him. He ended up running a day camp for youngsters as a way of making ends meet. He would come over to visit with my Father, usually on the weekends, and they would play chess. He liked my Father especially because he spoke a good German. They had long discussions. As I recall, his mother-in-law had some connections with Nazi officials in Germany before they left. She became convinced that a safe place to go to would be Madagascar. Madagascar is an island off southern Africa, which was considered by the Nazis at one time as an answer to the Jewish problem in Europe. The idea was that all the Jews would be transported to Madagascar and isolated there under Nazi supervision. This woman took into her head that she should get to Madagascar by





hook or by crook. After a while I think she did leave. I don't know whether she ever got to Madagascar.

I later came across this idea of the Madagascar sanctuary when I read the *Proceedings of the Second Yad Vashem International Historical Conference*, April 19th, 1974 edition. In the second Session there is a discussion about Roosevelt and a resettlement question of the Jews of Europe. According to these proceedings, the Germans did talk about Madagascar and, of course, they did not consider it as an independent Jewish State in any sense of the word but only as a "Jewish Reservation". It turns out that in the thirties the Roosevelt administration as well as the British and the French spent a great deal of time and energy trying to find a place for resettlement of the European Jews. As they looked around the world the only country that was willing to cooperate with the idea was Costa Rica. Costa Rica was rejected by the Jewish community.

The Roosevelt administration took the point of view that the Jews should be used as colonizers of certain areas of the world. Of course the colonization was to occur anywhere but in Palestine. Here is a sample paragraph out of the proceedings talking about Roosevelt and the resettlement question. "The analogy to colonial America was sometimes taken to ridiculous extremes. Thus the resettlement prospects in British Giana, ten degrees above the equator were believed by one administration official to be identical with the conditions faced by the early settlers in Virginia and therefore suitable for a Jewish pioneer effort."

It seems that the Nazis were willing to let Jews go up until 1942. In 1942 their policy did change and no Jews were permitted to emigrate but even that was not strictly enforced. Prior to that time, large numbers of Jews attempted to leave, and did leave to France and to various other European countries. In 1935 according, to my information, many of the Jews that left for France returned to Germany because they were unable to make ends meet in France. The attitude was that if they were going to starve to death they might as well starve to death at home in Germany. I'm getting ahead of my story a little bit, but when we got to Budapest in 1944 there were rumors that the Nazis were permitting Jewish immigration to Palestine via Turkey as long as the Jew was able to show a permit from the British Mandate. These permits were indeed being issued by the British in very small numbers as late as 1944.





When I was little my Mother was always terribly concerned with my health. I was a small, very thin for my age, and I looked somewhat sickly. This created concern on her part no end. She was always trying to stuff me with extra food, to fatten me up a little. She would always compare me to other kids that we knew and would say, "You see how nice and chubby he is - he 's like a steel roller (vasgyuro) compared to you." There was one little boy in particular who nobody really liked but he was to be my model for being nice and chubby. I was a very fussy eater. With a piece of chicken on my plate, the first thing I would do is remove the skin. This was frowned upon in those days. The skin was a good part of the chicken, it contained a lot of fat, but somehow I didn't care for it. For breakfast my Mother would play tricks on me. I would drink Ovalmaltine which, I guess is a take off on Ovaltine that's sold nowadays America. It was a chocolate flavored malt powder that one would mix in milk. Periodically she would mix in a raw egg. As I would try to drink, I would notice the egg whites which didn't quite mix into the drink. After a few swallows I'd start to throw up. I would accuse her of putting in a the raw egg and she would deny it vehemently and telling me that it was all my imagination.

The winters were extremely severe in Kosice, very cold, and lots of snow and wind. As youngsters we would have frequent colds and she was very much concerned about that. We had a family physician, a very interesting and impressive personality. I'll never forget him. His name was Dr. Lövy. He was a man in his late sixties and of course he would make house calls. Whenever my Mother found me with a cold, she would proceed to examine me first for temperature and then she would look at my throat and that kind of thing. Then she would decide whether she should call Dr. Lövy. I always tried to talk her out of it because whenever Dr. Lövy would show up I would have to take some medication.

Dr. Lövy would show up very promptly whenever called. He had a very formal suit on and a vest with a pocket watch. He would wear a Hamburg hat. He had a very neatly trimmed full beard, and he wore eye glasses which were clipped on his nose. He would proceed to examine me first with a stethoscope. Then he would put his ice cold ears against my chest to listen to my lungs and heart. He would usually have medication with him in his large leather bag. In those days the most important aspect of treating a chest cold was warm chicken fat rubbed on the chest and upper back (an early version of vapor rub) then covered with a heated cloth to



insure further warmth. Believe me, it was quite effective. Dr. Lövy recommended that since we got little sunlight in the wintertime, we should take quartz treatments. Both Otto and I were taken, I believe, once a week, to a medical office, and were exposed to quartz light for about half an hour with goggles protecting our eyes. Allegedly this contributed to our production of Vitamin D.

Whenever we got sick my Mother went through kind of a ritual which must have come out of the Middle ages. She always thought that perhaps we got a "Nehare," an evil eye from someone. To alleviate that she would get a glass of water, put some ashes in it, would kind of sprinkle some of the ash-water on me and would say "Poo Poo Kinehare." I guess it must have helped because as soon as she got through, I felt better.

My Father was very spartan and was very rarely ill. He ate well. He was a very neat looking fellow always properly dressed with shining shoes. We did not have hot running water, only cold. We would have hot water only if we fired up the water heater located adjacent to the bath tub. Once a week, usually Thursday nights, we would fire it up and the family would take a bath. During the week we would use cold water to wash. My Father, in the cold morning hours, proceeded to wash himself from the waist up, and would even dunk his whole head into the ice cold basin. He had a full head of hair. He was already approaching fifty at this time, and he did not have any gray. His was thick and curly and he was very proud of it.

We had good dental care. The dental offices in those days were well equipped as I recall. They had the electric drills. We never got novocaine shots, instead they were using some kind of spray. The spray froze the tooth and one didn't feel any of the drilling pain. I guess it was probably some kind of high pressure gas which sub-cooled as it expanded against the tooth. In any case it was very effective.

As Czechoslovakia fell apart, Uncle Francis who lived in Prague, along with my Aunt Lilly, who was his younger sister, managed to get out of Czechoslovakia and to the United States in the nick of time.

Aunt Mariska who lived in Kolozsvár (Cluj), Transylvania, also managed to get out in the last minute. She had considerable difficulty though because she was determined to take her entire household furnishings with her. She had it all crated





but as the situation developed she was not able to get it transported. All ships and trains were already under quarantine, not able to cross international borders. As a result she managed to get on a commercial flight from Bucharest to Lisbon but had to leave all her personal belongings behind. And it seems that she was very attached to these household items which consisted of expensive China, Persian rugs, needlepoint pictures and expensive furnishings. In order to have her leave, my Mother promised her that she will save all her household belongings and she will send them eventually one way or another. As I recall my Mother spent a great deal of time getting her stuff from Budapest to Kosice and had it stored in my Father's warehouse. Some of these household items survived the Holocaust. Mariska, who was a widow, had a stamp collection inherited from her husband and I was looking forward to getting my hands on it. Unfortunately as we received the stamps the rare ones were punched worthless because of the duty involved in connection with their value.

After the Germans occupied Moravia and Bohemia they renounced their Naval pact with England, the Non-Aggression pact with Poland, concluded a ten year alliance with Italy and a Non-Aggression pact with U.S.S.R. The latter was the so called Ribbentrop-Molotov pact which, in a secret provision, divided Poland between the Russians and the Nazis. In retrospect this pact created all the conditions necessary for Hitler to proceed with World War II. He was very much concerned about fighting a two front war and thus he was able to assure himself that the Russians were not going to attack him, at least not in the near future. As a result he attacked in the West, hoping to conquer all of Western Europe before proceeding against the East. In September of 1939 therefore, the Nazis, the Germans invaded Poland. The British and the French declared war on Germany.

At the same time Roosevelt declared U.S. neutrality as he was very much pressured to keep the U.S. out of war. In retrospect this was a major blunder. If the Germans would have been told in no uncertain terms that the United States will enter the war should they move against Poland, there probably would not have been a World War II. Of course Roosevelt did have a great deal of pressure put on him. He was up for re-election the following year and U.S. public sentiment was generally against getting involved in any European war. The German American Bund was just one of those factors. The "left" including the Communists staged mass demonstrations in Washington to keep the U.S. uninvolved. At that time the Soviet line was that





the U.S. should not interfere in Europe regardless of what Hitler does. In 1941 when they got attacked these very same demonstrations were turned 180 degrees.

The Czechoslovak government managed to escape from Prague as the Germans approached the city and reorganized in London. In 1940 they were recognized by the British and the French, as well as by the United States, as a provisional government in exile headed by Edvard Beneš. He was the President of the Republic at the time succeeding the founding President Masaryk who died in 1937. The Hungarian government declared war, along with the Germans, on the French and the British with some hesitation. The Horthy government was essentially Anglophile and they did not visualize any military action by the Hungarian Army against any British detachments anywhere in Europe. They were primarily reserving themselves for action against the Bolsheviks in the East. That, of course, they did later with a great amount of fanfare until they got into a great deal of difficulty.

Generally speaking, the Hungarians had very limited military capability. Their personnel were not well trained. Their equipment was inferior to anything the Germans had. They started the military draft about this time and of course the Jews were not to escape this fate. They were distrustful of the Jews. To alleviate the dilemma they set up special Jewish work battalions which would be assigned to Hungarian regular troops. They ended up doing all the hard and dangerous work. These labor battalions, called "Munkatáboros," became the predominant threat to Jewish men starting on or about 1940. They dreaded this service as they were generally badly treated, depending on the Commander. From time to time we had occasion to talk to some of these "Munkatáboros" personnel.

Fortunately my Father was not subject to this draft because he was already over age. Starting about 1941, whenever we would go to the Temple on Friday nights, after services there were always a number of these labor battalion men who would be invited to the homes of the Congregants for dinner. My Father usually would invite one of them, sometimes two. They would describe the situation at length to my Father in front of us kids during dinner. Most of them were on their way out to the Front, going through Kassa. Only one or two had already been East. Thus most of the information we were getting was about their treatment while still in Hungary. Their treatment was indeed quite severe even while still in Hungary. They were not provided with winter clothing. Thus they had to provide it



themselves. They were not in uniform. They wore yellow arm bands which identified them. The rumors were that as they would reach the Eastern front, they were used to clear mine fields and were generally given the most dangerous tasks. They were issued no weapons. Their casualty rate was quite high once they got to the Front. They were short of food and supplies. It was a real disaster.

In the summer of 1941 Kassa was bombed.

My Mother usually made sure that during summer vacation I would go to the countryside either to a cousin or to summer camp. It was more often to a cousin. We had a very lovely young cousin living in Midszentmihaly, a small village, about 100 miles southeast of Kassa. I went there grudgingly as I was never consulted about the plans. I was simply told that I was going to visit Bözsike, and put on the train with one of the salesmen that worked for my father. He dropped me off at Midszentmihaly.

Bozsike was a first cousin on the the Grossman side. She was married to a man by the name of Dezső Kessner. Kessner owned a small lumber yard in the town. He was drafted for work battalion service so Bozsike was left alone with a young son about two years of age. I was elected to go there for four to six weeks and keep her company during summer vacation.

As I stayed in that small village I was terribly bored. There wasn't very much to do and there weren't any boys of my age around. The lumber yard was run by an old man, an employee of Dezső. There wasn't much business either. But I had occasion to observe local village life which was rather pleasant and serene.

Since we were already in the war, there was some shortages, primarily things like wool and cotton. As a result a cottage industry sprung up in the countryside. It had to do with raising Angora rabbits and using their fur to make sweaters and such. Across the street from Bözsike lived a Jewish family, with a couple of young teenage girls. They befriended me and showed me their Angora rabbits. They would brush them, remove the hair and would spin that into yarn. They would hand knit very nice Angora sweaters. I was entertained with that for a while. Then I had occasion to watch the village livestock herd leaving in the morning - the town was strictly a one street affair. Everything was coming in or going out through that one street. In





the early morning hours, the village shepherd would start walking along the street and whistle periodically. As a consequence the cows would appear from both sides of the street and follow him. About 4:30 in the afternoon the shepherd would come back with the herd. He would approach each of the houses going down the street each cow knew exactly where to peel off from the herd and go into his home barn. Usually, at about 5:00PM, milking took place, Bozsike would send me to one of the farmers to drink some very fresh milk.

About once a week a public drummer would appear on the street. He would disseminate what was considered official news. I suppose this drummer was a throwback of the Napoleonic age. He would stand in the middle of the street, start drumming, and then announce, "Hear ye, hear ye." He would read the announcements that included some news or some decree or other.

Very few people had radios in the village but there were some newspapers. One day, this must have been about a August, I took a walk through the village. There was a general store nearby and as I poked my nose in I noticed a newsstand. On the newsstand there was a paper with a huge headline. "Kassa Bombed." I quickly ran home and confronted Bőzsike with the news. To allay my fears she tried clumsily to tell me that this is a different Kassa, this was not the Kassa I lived in. I knew better and insisted that we get in touch with my parents. It took us two or three days to get through by phone. Finally we did manage to reach them and I was instructed to get on a train and come home.

After I got home I managed to find out about the details of the bombing. First of all, my Mother and Father and Otto left town immediately after the bombing. They stayed away for a few days because nobody really knew what to expect next. As my friend Peter told me, the beautiful new Post Office, completed just about a year before in the modern section of town, was bombed by a single airplane with a single bomb. The blame was put on the Russians. Rumor had it, however, that the bombing was done by the Germans to provoke the Hungarians into joining them in the attack against the Soviet Union. The damage was superficial, was soon repaired and things went back to normal.

About this time we began to hear some very ugly rumors about Slovakia. As I mentioned before, Slovakia gained her independence and entered the war on the





German side. The country was run by a group of extremely antisemitic Catholic priests. They put through a number of decrees directed against the Jewish community. For starters, they decreed that all Jewish businesses had to acquire a Gentile Slovak partner. Uncle Moritz, fortunately, was able to find a relatively mild partner primarily because he had good relations with the Gentile community. As I understand it, this was not the case for Uncle Wilmos.

A while later, the Slovaks decreed that the Jews were to be resettled in the East and promptly got the Germans to deport them. According to the Yad Vashem archives, the Slovaks were especially rotten, because they were paying the Germans for their effort. In no other country, as far as I know, did the Nazis get compensation for what they did to the Jews. The Slovaks were unique in this regard.

In the summer of 1942, an attempt was made to pay off the Germans in Slovakia. Rabbi Mendel and Gizi Fleishman approached the Nazi in charge and asked him in plain language what it would take to stop the deportations. To their surprise, there was an answer. A large sum of money was demanded and received.

About mid-June, the Germans suddenly became "disinterested" in further deportation from Slovakia. On June 25th a conference took place between the Germans and the Slovak premier Tuka. This conversation resulted in a telegram being sent to Berlin stating that further Slovak deportations were "impossible" due to Slovak opposition. But, in fact, there was no Slovak opposition. Although they would have liked to continue deportations, they found that they were not able to run the economy with all Jews gone. As a result, deportations were suspended but the Germans were paid off.

Later, the brave Gizi Fleishman met her death in Auschwitz. She attempted to negotiate on behalf of the Hungarian Jews. She complained about the inhumane and crowded conditions in some of the transports. The Nazis, with cynical courtesy, placed her in an empty cattle car and shipped her to Auschwitz in great "comfort."

On or about this time, a young Jew by the name of Rudolph Vrba was deported from Slovakia and ended up in Auschwitz. He and his companion, Allen Bestik, are the only documented persons to have escaped from there and live to tell about it. Vrba wrote a book on the subject. The title of the book is *I Cannot Forgive*. In a nutshell,



Vrba, a 19 year old, escaped from Bratislava to Hungary, as many Slovak Jews did to avoid deportation. Somehow or other he ended up going back to Bratislava, at which time he was apprehended and deported to Auschwitz, which was just then being prepared to become a major concentration camp and extermination site. Being very bright and speaking perfect German, he managed to ingratiate himself with the German authorities and ended up getting a job in the office, working on statistical matters.

As he describes it in his book, he didn't even know where he was located in terms of relative distances from various locales. Thus he was hesitant about planning an escape. Then one day, as he was going through the belongings of some of the new arrivals, he found a child's book. The book contained a map. The child must have been from the neighboring villages because the map indicated the location of Auschwitz as a small town. He was thus able to determine the way he would have to travel to escape. He decided to formulate an escape plan, described in detail in the book.

Specifically, there was an inner and outer perimeter in Auschwitz. Work battalions would be permitted to work in the outer perimeter during the day. They returned at sunset to the inner perimeter which was heavily secured. The outer perimeter was not secured after nightfall because all inmates were returned to the inner perimeter. Knowing this and knowing the exact schedules, he decided to hide in a woodpile in the outer perimeter. He also knew that they will be searching for him immediately after sunset with guard dogs. He met an old Russian in the camp who advised him to get some tobacco, mix it with blood and burn it to get the dogs off his scent.

This plan worked for him and a companion. They managed to remain in the woodpile for several days. After the Germans gave up on looking for them, they managed to find their way back to Slovakia and eventually ended up in Hungary. In Hungary he contacted members of the Jewish community and told them about the details of Auschwitz. People refused to believe the facts at that time. There was a trial conducted in Israel, I believe in the late '50's, which dealt with some of Vrba's disclosures.

As we continued to hear about these rumors my Father did communicate with his brothers in Slovakia on an infrequent basis because it was very difficult to keep in





touch. Telephone service, as far as I know, was cut and the mails were censored. They would use couriers, usually farmers who would cross the border between Slovakia and Hungary. Some owned land on both sides of the border. By this time there was an "underground railroad" used by Jews to escape from Poland, Slovakia, Germany, Austria, the Ukraine etc. to Hungary. Usually these farmers would be instrumental in implementing these escapes.

By this time the Phony War in the West became a shooting war and the Germans speedily won it. Dunkirk was evacuated with tremendous losses. Father would listen to foreign broadcasts on a regular basis. The Berlin broadcasts gave him considerable discomfort when he heard Hitler rant and rave about how he's going to destroy the British and eradicate London. We were able to get the BBC broadcasts as well, although, as time went on, the Germans started jamming it.

The British had a world service broadcast in just about every language, including Hungarian. My Father would listen first to the German version followed by Hungarian. He became more and more concerned about our situation. It became illegal to listen to foreign broadcasts so we had to be extra careful. He would turn the radio way down and he would put his ear against the speaker. The fact that the British broadcast system decided to use Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as their broadcast symbol made it more difficult to keep the reception quiet. It started usually with "boom boom boom boom, boom boom boom boom, "I si Lo," in French or in German. This "boom boom boom boom" was very hard to conceal.

As we all now know, the operation of the British in the West was a disaster even though, as we found out later, they had a great advantage over the Germans. They broke the German military code. This information was finally declassified in the '70's in a book titled *Ultra Secret*. In a nutshell, the Germans developed a very concise code machine which was distributed to all their troops. In Poland, the underground managed to steal one of these machines and had it delivered to England. After a brilliant effort, the British were able to use the machine to decode just about all of the German military communications in the West. They knew exactly where and when they were planning to strike.

But the British had one big disadvantage. They did not have sufficient resources to counteract the German moves. As a result they lost the war in short order on the





Continent in 1940-1941. There is an interesting story that goes with this. It seems that Churchill was getting advance information about German bombing targets in the early days of the war. Information decoded one day was that the Germans were planning to bomb Coventry, one of the cities in England. He had the dilemma to decide whether to evacuate Coventry. If he were to evacuate, that would have been a giveaway to the Germans. Churchill decided not to evacuate, and there were heavy civilian casualties.

Another interesting tidbit has to do with Chamberlain who has been condemned by history for his appeasement of Hitler. In fact, Chamberlain, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, (before he became Prime Minister) made certain preparations which became crucial for Britain. Even though he believed that perhaps one can deal with Hitler, he funded the development of the Spitfire fighter plane in 1936. As a result, at the time of the battle for Britain, the Spitfire was in full production and made the difference in the air war. Were it not for Chamberlain's foresight, the British Isles might have been invaded and the war would have ended with different results. The Germans indeed had plans to invade the British Isles but the plan required that they have absolute air superiority. They were not able to attain this because of the Spitfire.

There's another interesting item that I'd like to talk about here and that is the business of Franco and Spain. In the early '30's, Franco had a considerable amount of support from Hitler in his Civil War against the government of Spain. Ultimately of course, Franco prevailed with considerable German help. On the eve of World War II when the Germans actually conquered all of France and were conducting an air war against the British, they decided to take Gibraltar. In order to take Gibraltar it was necessary for them to cross Spanish territory. They approached Franco to get his permission. But to their surprise Franco was absolutely opposed to the idea.

It seems that Franco was somewhat of an Anglophile. The way I heard it, he met Hitler on an occasion and Hitler brought up the issue of Gibraltar. Franco pretended that he didn't understand what he was talking about. To counter Hitler's request, he put the arm on Hitler for all kinds of military and economic assistance. Hitler was so disgusted that he told one of his adjutants that he would rather see a dentist than to talk to Franco again. Franco did send some military units to the Russian



front later but he did not enter the war against the British. He survived World War II in fairly good shape. As the tragedy of the French Jews unfolded, Franco was receptive to Jewish refugees. This was not commonly known because everybody assumed that since he was a friend of Hitler, Spain would not be a sanctuary.

According to the Yad Vashem archives there was a representative of the Haganah in Spain who tried to encourage refugees to come to Spain from France. He wasn't terribly successful because of the misconception about Franco's attitude towards the Jews. The fact that the refugees had to cross some very rough terrain in the Pyrenees also discouraged their escape to Spain. Later, after the War, Franco officially invited the Jews back to Spain. He thus he tried to correct a wrong which was done in 1492 by Ferdinand and Isabella.

My Father and I, as we listened to the BBC broadcasts, kept track of things as they were occurring, the fighting in North Africa which was just beginning at that time, the losses that the British had to absorb, America still neutral, and the atrocities that were beginning to filter through from German-occupied Poland. Things looked pretty bleak to us and we were getting terribly concerned.

I was by this time in the second grade and I started my Hebrew education. My Father decided to send me to what was referred to as cheider. He engaged a man who was not a professional teacher. I'll never forget him! I don't recall his name anymore but I went to his house twice a week. Otto would also come, and my friend Peter, after I started, decided to come along too. The cheider was a very small apartment in a courtyard. It consisted of an elongated room which served as a kitchen, living room, dining room, and an additional room for the bedroom. The teacher lived there with his wife, a son and a daughter. All four of them lived in this tiny little apartment. He set up a long table in the kitchen with a couple of benches and that's where we sat and studied. He had no more than half a dozen pupils at the time.

He once told us his story. He was a Yeshiva graduate. He had a small grocery store on one of the side streets in Kosice. As the Slovaks and Czechs withdrew in face of the Hungarian advance, a lot of looting took place. He was held up and lost all his possessions. He was not able to restart his business primarily because he didn't have the resources and secondarily he wasn't able to get a business permit (Ipar) from the





Hungarians. So he fell back on his Hebrew knowledge and he earned his living by teaching Hebrew.

His wife took in wash. One afternoon we got home and I complained to my Mother about a severe headache. She investigated and she found that the woman was doing some ironing in the corner of the kitchen and we got a mild case of carbon monoxide poisoning. In those days they didn't use electric irons. Irons were filled with hot coals. Since there was very little ventilation in the kitchen the incomplete combustion of the charcoal resulted in some carbon monoxide. In any case that was the last time she did ironing while we were having a study session.

The Rebbe, as we called him, was not a very good teacher. Although he did have a good education he wasn't able to conduct a good class. He would give us an assignment, basically, to study Chumash. He would translate for us into German and then we would have to memorize the translation. He also attempted to teach us a little Rashi and he wasn't terribly successful at that. About the only real thing I got out of his education were the daily prayers. He drilled into us all the prayers that were customarily said during the services; the Shacharit, Mincha and Ma'ariv prayers. I knew those by heart. Otherwise the rest of the education was of little value.

He had a very dim view of our future. He kept telling me that unless we change our ways and become good Jews we are not going to survive this war. At the age of eight he also impressed on me that in the Temple, every time one is supposed to say "Amen," it has to be said in a very clear loud voice. The more Amen's you respond to, the better one's chances of surviving the war. So as a result to this day whenever I have an appropriate place to say "Amen," I say Amen in a loud clear voice.

He was also telling us about how God knows everything we do. We will get our reward according to our behavior. I had a little debate with him. I questioned how is it possible for the Almighty to be able to keep track of every thought and every action. There are so many people around, there's no physical possibility that He could keep track of everybody. No one knew about computers in those days but it seems to me that at this day and age almost any credit company will be able to provide the information that the Almighty was supposed to have had back in 1941. I suppose the Rebbe was right, but was ahead of his time.





He smoked a long, stemmed cherrywood pipe. If one did an especially good job of translating the Chumash he would give him a swig on his pipe as a reward. I wasn't particularly looking forward to that reward because the mouthpiece of the pipe was chewed halfway through and it didn't look particularly appetizing.

In June of 1941 Hitler attacked Russia without warning. Before doing that though he attacked Yugoslavia and there was a great deal of devastation in connection with that. He bombed Belgrade and there were a lot of casualties. My Father would hear all this on the radio. The German version usually varied from what the British were broadcasting out of London. There was a great deal of propaganda coming out of the Axis side and all the newspapers were either censored or completely one sided. We couldn't rely on any local news sources. It was strictly a matter of listening to the BBC. Radio Moscow was also available to us. For some reason, and I suppose I can guess why, my Father rarely listened to Moscow.

The invasion of Yugoslavia by the Germans was necessitated by the fact that the Yugoslavs put up resistance to a German dictated government. Hitler intended to invade Russia about a month earlier than he actually did, but because of the Yugoslav resistance he had to delay Operation Barbarosa. This delay was crucial as it did not give him enough time to complete the thrust toward Moscow before the severe Russian winter set in. Would he have started earlier, he could have occupied Moscow and perhaps history would have been written differently. As it happened, he got stopped within a few miles of Moscow and with the first severe winter, his operations bogged down and the war was essentially lost. Of course none of us realized it at the time.

With the German invasion of Russia, war started for us as well. The Hungarians declared war on the Soviet Union and sent Hungarian troops to the Eastern front along with the Jewish labor battalions. The war years initially started out relatively mildly in terms of the Jewish situation in Hungary. The Slovakian deportations had stopped and the Hungarians were not ready to do anything more to the Jews than restrict them in the profession and in business. Hungary became a refuge for the Slovakian, the Polish, and the German Jews. The Hungarian authorities did everything in their power to try to apprehend them. Once apprehended they would be returned to their native country and/or interned in Hungary in concentration



camps. These camps were relatively mild compared to what the Nazi concentration camps were.

On many occasions we would be challenged by Hungarian police or army personnel to produce identification to show that we were Hungarian citizens. This happened frequently after services on Friday nights as we would exit the Synagogue. We would find ourselves surrounded by armed Hungarian army or police. People who did not have the proper identification were arrested. My Father, of course carried his citizenship paper photostat and would have this on his person at all times. Whenever he would produce it, that would be sufficient for the police to let us go. He had the citizenship certificate photostated because it was not unusual for the police, out of meanness, to take the document, tear it up and say, "Well now Jew, are you still a citizen?" He would have the original in safe keeping for the eventuality that something like this would happen.

These challenges would occur frequently in the middle of the day within the city as well. Suddenly several policemen with submachine guns would block off certain areas and ask for identification of the people that were caught in this net. I as a child was never detained. They didn't pay attention me. They were interested mostly in adults. I had really no identification with me either. There were none issued for children except for a trolley pass. This kind of operation was commonly referred to as "Razia". The dreaded word was "Razia".

The local authorities began to organize a civil defense system for possible air attacks. It consisted of a complete night blackout and organizing the cellars in the buildings for refuge during air raid. In the early days we did have a few air raid. Usually the sirens would go off in the middle of the night. We would then proceed to the cellars and we'd stay there for maybe an hour. With nothing happening, and we would have the "all clear" sound and return to bed. The blackout was taken very seriously and we had to install heavy curtains on all the windows. We all realized, I guess, that Kassa was not a strategic target. The likelihood of us being bombed other than that phony bomb that fell on the Post office was not very great.

There was a railroad bridge down the street from us. I discussed it with my friend Peter and I decided that this may be an actual target for a future air attack. I was





looking forward to an air attack because I thought that this would probably shorten the war and the defeat of Nazis was foremost on my mind.

I started buying a picture magazine off the newsstands from time to time. It was something like the "Inquirer" in America today. It was very sensational. It showed pictures of military men, tanks, and battlefields. We were very curious as to what was happening. These were still the times when everything was victorious for the German army. My Father saw me read one of these. He was very unhappy about it. "What's the matter with you? Why are you spending money on this fascist trash?" From then on I was more careful about what I bought, but I found those pictures fascinating nevertheless. I also knew that he was right and this was not something that I should be spending my money on.

The air raids continued but we ignored them after a while. We just didn't feel like getting up in the middle of the night in the cold of winter, getting dressed and going down to the cellars. Since it was optional and it was not something that we felt strongly about, we just ignored it.

The authorities built some public shelters in the Central Park called a "liget." They consisted basically of trenches covered with dirt. Peter, Laci and I found them useful. We would use them for trying our hand at smoking. Any child could buy cigarettes at the tobacconist referred to as "traffik." These people were selling stamps and cigarettes and they were usually wounded war veterans who were franchised by the government. We would buy two or three cigarettes and we would go down into these trenches and smoke.

I come home one day and my Mother said. "You know, I smell smoke on you. Were you near somebody who did a lot of smoking?" Of course I pretended didn't know what she was talking about. Next time we decided we'd better take a sandwich along and eat something after we smoked so it wouldn't be so noticeable on our breath. We did that once or twice. One day I got very sick from smoking. I didn't quite know how to inhale and I swallowed a lot of smoke. I ended up with a very sour stomach.

My Father's business prospered during these days, believe it or not. I would spend some time at his office after school and would take pride in contributing my labor to





the cause by stamping his stationary. It seems that in 1938 or thereabouts he let out a large order for envelopes and letterheads. As the Hungarians took over, he got stuck with letterheads which said "Kosice" instead of "Kassa". The thrifty individual he was, he didn't want to throw out his stationary. He decided he was going to overstamp it, take the "Kosice" out and stamp "Kassa" over it. This was a tedious job. Everytime I'd go and visit him he would sit me down at a desk, give me the stamp, stamp pad, and a whole bunch of envelopes and letterheads. I would proceed to stamp "Kassa" onto the letterheads.

His bookkeeper Mr. Lowinger, was almost like a partner. I'll never forget him. He was a real gentleman and a meticulous writer. I say meticulous because I admired his handwriting no end. He had a missing finger on his right hand. The way I figured it, he probably mutilated himself to stay out of the army in the earlier days. This was a common practice. At any rate he was my Father's right hand man.

As I said before, my Father was very spartan. On one occasion in the warehouse, he jumped from barrel to barrel, and stretched a ligament in his leg. He started to limp. As he came home my Mother noticed the limp and asked him about it. He minimized the problem. The next day he was scheduled to go on a business trip. My Mother told him to stay home because he was not up to travelling. He insisted on going. He got his suitcase and left the house for the railroad station. Within an hour he was back. My Mother was right after all. The doctor put him to bed.

The remedy involved heat on the knee. We didn't have electric heating pads in those days. We would place the sacks of sand in the hot oven and then take the hot sand bags and put them around his knee. He was off his feet for about a month. During this time my Mother tried to run the business. She would go in daily and try to do whatever needed to be done. Of course Mr. Lowinger was fully qualified to do the work but my Mother insisted that she get involved in the business. To make a long story short after about two or three weeks my Mother and Mr. Lowinger got into a hassle. My Father had to adjudicate. My Mother insisted that Mr Lowinger be fired. My Father, knowing him and his capabilities was extremely hesitant to do so. The net result was that my Father got out of bed quickly and got back into business. Mr. Lowinger stayed on.



My Father's business premises consisted mostly of warehousing, a two-story warehouse, a small office and a couple of additional small rooms adjoining the office. The small rooms were used for packaging paint pigment which was one of my Father's innovations. In those days paint pigments or anything of that sort was sold in bulk. The retailer would weigh the product for a specific order. My Father did pre-packaging, which I'm sure was invented in America but was not prevalent in our part of Europe. He hired people to do the packaging and the labeling.

In particular he had an employee, Mrs. Garcsar, who had worked for him for some years doing this kind of work on a part time basis. She had a son about my age. She lived on the outskirts of town. This woman became a key factor in our plans, as they developed later, to escape the Nazi net.

The warehouse also served as the garage for the automobile. In addition we also used it for storing our two wheel bicycle and a small pedal-driven automobile with electric headlights. The latter was given to me by Uncle Francis before he left for America and it was my prized possession.

Behind the warehouse there was a courtyard. There was an area that belonged to a blacksmith. I spent many an hour watching the man and his helpers work. The man was a genius. He was able to do anything and everything with metal. He would forge iron with his helpers. He would make gratings and machine parts. I would observe him many afternoons as I would be visiting my Father. He would only very rarely look up, but whenever he did he would give me a little wink. Somehow I had the feeling that the man was well educated.

In the rear, there was a single family residence with kind of an open area in front of it. In the wintertime we would make attempts to make an ice skating rink out of that area. We would block it off with stones and then we'd pour water in the hopes that it would freeze overnight. The next day we could use it for skating.

My younger brother Sanyi who was born in 1938, liked to play in that part of the yard. He befriended some of the children living in the residence. He'd spent more time there than he would at home. He was difficult to handle, especially when he didn't want to go somewhere, like home, I'd have to drag him from time to time with all my might as he put up quite a fight. He was a very stubborn little boy.





There was very little air activity over Hungary at this time. As a matter of fact, as far as I know, Hungary was not bombed in earnest till July of 1944. There were some overflights, but not near us. On or about 1942, the Allies decided to give top priority to bombing the Ploesti oil fields in Eastern Rumania. This was the primary source of oil for the Germans. As a result, frequent bombing runs were undertaken from North African bases and later from Italy. The Germans were well prepared to defend these oil fields and the Allies sustained great losses. This was especially true during the early phases. Nevertheless, the bombings continued to the very end.

The Hungarians authorities undertook some food rationing. As I recall, it had to do sugar and imported foodstuffs such as olive oil. There was plenty of local food available. Although a black market of sorts did develop, most food items were available at reasonable prices. The Hungarian peasantry was an efficient food producer. Hungary was a net exporter of food during the war. Germans were dependent on Hungarian food exports. As a matter of fact, Raul Wallenberg was involved in food exports when he became entangled in the fate of the Hungarian Jews in 1944. More about that later.

About the only food in short supply was kosher beef. The authorities outlawed the ritual slaughter of cattle. As a result, we had beef rather infrequently whenever available on the black market. This was not the case with chicken however.

Everything was under price control. My Father was once accused of price-gouging (ár-drágítás). That incident caused him many sleepless nights. Eventually he was vindicated. He was completely incapable of any wrong doing or duplicity, and I was certain that he was completely innocent of the charges.

There was a shortage of leather and thus shoes disappeared from the stores. We would have them custom made. We would each get two pair of new shoes around Passover time. My Father would try to impress on us how expensive shoes were in the hopes of preventing us from playing too much soccer in them. Another item in short supply was bar soap.

By this time, we became aware of many military transports coming through town. Kassa was on the route of the Eastern front. Initially, they were mostly Hungarian





trains. Later we would see motorised German convoys. On weekends, Peter and I would roam the narrow street of Old Town. We would see groups of German military vehicles completely taking over these narrow streets.

The Old Town, or town center, was a popular meeting place for young people on Sunday afternoons. Main Street became a promenade where young people would stroll past each other in groups (korzo). Our maid would usually be part of this scene. She would dress up in her Sunday best, which was her beautiful peasant costume. It consisted of a heavily embroidered blouse and a pettycoat-filled skirt. It was very fashionable for the period. German uniformed troops would participate in the Promenade. I would often notice a young German take interest in our maid.

I was a great admirer of the German military hardware. As many of these military vehicles were parked unattended, Peter and I had a good chance to examine them close up. There was an amphibious jeep which was especially interesting. It could float and had front and rear steering.

On occasion, we would see German soldiers in black uniforms with the "Totenkopf" insignia. We knew that these were SS. We also heard of some of their exploits in the East.

Some German military convoys were passing directly under the windows of our apartment on Nádor Utza . We lived in a triplex. It was a well kept small building with a locked gate. Upstairs we had three bedrooms, a living/dining room, kitchen, maids room, and a large pantry. We had electricity, running water and even a telephone. There was a small enclosed yard completely taken up by a huge walnut tree. By autumn it was usually loaded with fruit. I would look forward to its harvest. In the meantime I would satisfy myself with the fallen-off nuts, which I would quickly gather. That time of year, my hands would often show signs of dark discoloration. This was the result of handling the outer green skin of the walnut. These walnuts were delicious and tasted quite apart from the mature dry walnut. Needless to say, there was excitement when the man would come and harvest the tree. He would climb up into it and shake all the branches. Suddenly there was a "rain" of fresh walnuts ready for the taking.



On occasion, I would go to my Father's warehouse after school and take out the two-wheeled bicycle and ride around the neighborhood. On one occasion, I was riding on Nádor Utza, practically in front of our house. Unnoticed, a German military convoy approached from behind. Since I was close to the middle of the street, the lead vehicle let out a loud honk. I get out of the way in a panic. I barely get back to the warehouse, when I noticed my Father waiting for me. He already knew about the incident with the convoy. Someone must have already called him. He told me in plain language that he was not about to have me get run over by a German convoy. From then on, Nador Utza was off limits for bicycling.

It must have been in the summer of 1942, when my Mother decided to send me to Tokaj for my vacation. My aunt Rezsi lived there with her husband Shlomo and their family.

Tokaj was famous for its vineyards and they had some. My Father would on occasion in the Fall receive a supply of "must" from them. "Must" was partially fermented wine of which I was very fond. The Engels were Hassidic Jews. The men all wore heavy beards and the long sideburns (peyes). They had a general store. The younger son Yankel built himself a nice modern house right behind the store. He and his wife Irene had four children, two boys and two girls--Beru, Shiu, Matzi and Eva. The plan was to go to a farm and spend a few weeks there. The farm was owned by Irene's Father and they were about 75 - 80 miles from Tokaj. The Father did not live on the farm but he came along with us. The farm was extremely primitive. There were no utilities whatsoever and we all lived in rooms with clay floors.

The farm was full of farm animals of course; there were goats, geese, chickens, horses and cows.

Adjacent to the farm was an irrigation ditch which we used for swimming. There were also some small fish. We spent many an hour trying to catch fish. There was a large vegetable garden adjacent to the farm and we were able to pull carrots out of the ground and eat them right on the spot. There were poppy seed plants, corn stalks, and across the road, a large potatoe field. I got involved in the harvesting of that.





We had lot of fun. I was able to see first hand farming on a primitive Hungarian farm, "tanya". The people living there were also Orthodox Jews and of course we observed the Sabbath, there would be baking and in one of their clay ovens which look like an igloo. I was really surprised to see how efficient that oven was. All we had to do was put in a couple of handfuls of straw, light it and in no time at all that oven was hot enough to bake bread, Challah or Cholent.

The residents kind of took a liking to me and when a calf was born about a week after we got there they asked me of all the other children to find a name for the calf. Well that was relatively easy because the calf had a mark on his forehead which looked like a star, so I named him "Csillag" in Hungarian and that's the name that stuck.

About a week after we arrived we saw a wagon coming down the road. By the way, this farm was very isolated. The next neighbor must of been a couple miles down the road. We saw this wagon come down the road and lo and behold who was on that carriage but Lilly from Secovce, who I hadn't seen for about three years. As she approached and got off the wagon she gave me a big smile and put her finger on her lips implying that I shouldn't really say anything that was out of order. I instantly understood that she was probably trying to tell me that her presence should not be indicated as a surprise because she was actually there illegally as a refugee from Slovakia. At any rate she must have been about eighteen by now and she stayed on the "tanya" with us and we all tried to have a good time.

I especially looked forward to being able to drive a wagon. The man would get up into the seat and I would get next to him and he would let me hold the reins for a while after the wagon would get going. It was not as easy as it looked to control those horses.

On the Sabbath, on Saturday or even on Friday night, we would walk to the village which I would say was at least three miles and then we would walk back in the darkness. On occasion we would have wagons passing us by, usually full of peasants who were going home after getting drunk in the village.

After about four weeks this little vacation ended and I went back home. Lilly came back to Kassa also and she stayed with us. She had a room in somebody else's house





as she was there illegally. As far as I could tell, she did not have the proper papers so we had to be very careful about her not being caught in one of the Razia's. The poor girl must have been a nervous wreck. She was under a lot of pressure, she must have been homesick and the uncertainty of the situation was not a very pleasant thing for her. She spent time with us during the day helping my Mother and sitting around the house and that kind of thing but at sundown she would leave to go to her place where she would stay overnight.

When I got back to Kassa I found the circus coming to town. They were setting up the big tent in the square that was about three blocks away from our home. I was very excited about that since I'd never seen a circus before and some of the circus performers were Chinese and Black and we'd never seen an Oriental or a Negro before. The population in Eastern Europe was all Caucasian even though there were different nationalities they were all the same race. There were a lot of Gypsies. They would always be transients who would come through the town and they were really very badly treated because of their very poor reputation. Gypsies were considered thieves and murderers and just a very bad sort. They earned their living mostly through fencing stolen goods or telling fortunes and such, so when the circus came in they were usually also included in the activities.

As I remember they put up the big tent and the first performance was Saturday night. As I was observing the action, I found myself underneath the big tent as the performance began and I got very absorbed in the performance and before I knew it, it was after sundown on Saturday. When I got home it was already dark, and my Father was waiting for me at the door and he really let me have it. He always made Havdallah at the end of the Sabbath and he expected me to be home. He wanted to know where I had been and of course I wasn't about to admit to him that I was in the circus on Shabbos, and not only that, but that I had snuck in. So I just made up some excuse which didn't wash too well but he bought it and didn't make much of an issue of it.

In March of 1942 my Mother had her fourth son, Michael. He was born at home as opposed to us who were born in a sanatoria. I remember that particular weekend, I believe it was a weekend, quite well. The three of us were sent to a former neighbor of ours, the Frankels, with whom we remained very friendly. The Frankels used to live with us in the same building in a previous apartment complex about three or



four years before. Mr. Frankel was a travelling salesman and had a nervous breakdown a few years back. I remember it specifically because it was a very traumatic experience. They took him away in an ambulance and I was very upset by the scene.

His wife was a wonderful woman. She was an excellent cook and housekeeper. They had two daughters and a son. One of the daughters was Mongoloid, the oldest one I believe. The younger girl was very cute and I liked to be around her. We lost touch because, as I said, we moved away and they also moved from the old apartment complex. But they weren't terribly far from us so when the time came for my Mother to have Michael, we ended up staying with them overnight. The next day when we came back, I had another little brother.

Michael was a real cute little boy with a round face, very good natured, sweet, and easy to handle. We called him "Mityuka" which was a take off on Michael.

My Mother breast fed all her babies. In those days formulas were not readily available and unless there was a distress situation, people would breast feed their babies naturally. There was no such thing as a diaper service which meant that my Mother had to make arrangements for washing the diapers on a daily basis. A word about the washing of clothes in those days. We had no washing machines. Everything had to be done by hand. My Mother would hire a woman who went from house to house and do nothing but washing. On a wash day Mother would get up early in the morning and put some very large pots on the stove in the kitchen to boil a lot of hot water. The woman would show up and proceed to wash all the clothes by hand on a washboard. It was quite a tedious job. After the washing was done, the clothes would be hung out in the breeze to dry. After everything got dried the next day would be ironing day. There would be another woman that would show up and do all the ironing.

About that time we acquired a house guest. She was a woman from another town who's husband was arrested by the police for a crime which was not clear to me. The husband was a Cantor and he was arrested for being a Jew. The woman came to Kassa because he was being detained in Kassa. As I recall she was agonizing over the plight of her husband. She would daily go down to talk to the local police officials in an attempt to try and get her husband released. Eventually she did succeed by





bribing some of these police officials. I remember the day he was released. He came to our house and in gratitude to us he gave us a private concert. He was a very good Cantor and I enjoyed his performance very much.

In those days people generally did not stay in hotels. They were not only expensive but were notoriously inadequate and dirty. We had a hotel in Kassa called The Salkhaz, which was well known for weddings and special events. It had a very nice restaurant and coffee house. My Father would visit the coffee house from time to time after dinner on a weeknight and read some of the foreign newspapers in these coffee houses. He frequented either The Salkhaz or another one on Main street across from the Theatre. On rare occasions I would go with him and sit quietly and read something while he was going through the various papers. He read the Swiss and German papers available at the time.

On occasion we would go for a walk after dinner. My Mother would go to sleep early because she had to get up early to start household activities. The dark winter nights were especially pleasant. There was usually snow on the ground and as we walked down to Main street, the stores were all lit up. Around Christmas time they used to have a huge Christmas tree on the Main street and all the stores were especially nicely decorated. On the sidewalks there were vendors selling baked chestnuts or fresh popcorn. The fresh popcorn was popped right in front of us in a cage-like containers over an open fire. Father would buy me some popcorn on occasion, but if I asked, he would not necessarily comply. If I didn't, he would more often than not, decide to do so. He frowned upon eating in public so he would never touch the popcorn nor the chestnuts that he got for me. I had it all to myself.

We had a few excellent pastry shops along Main street. On occasion my Mother would give us a special treat and take us on Sunday or some weekday afternoon. They had excellent Napoleans. They had a special kind of dessert which I was especially fond of and which I haven't eaten since. I don't know if it still exists in the world. It consisted of chestnut puree covered with whipped cream. It was my favorite dessert and my Mother would occasionally treat me to it. She always felt that I was not eating enough and this was nourishing and thus she was all in favor it.





Around Chanukah time my Grandfather Hillman from Ungvar, would come and visit. As it happens Ungvar was also transferred to the Hungarians in 1938, the same time Kosice was. As a result it was relatively easy to travel to Ungvar. It did involve changing trains in Csap, because the train was not permitted to travel through Slovakian territory, the direct way to get to Ungvar. He would come without Grandmother on Chanukah. He would bring us gifts, domino sets and Chanukah gelt. We had quite a pleasant time of it. On occasion we would also go and visit him in Ungvar.

I remember one specific summer I spent some time there. He was living in retirement by then with his second wife. As I recall he had a large house with a huge backyard. There was also a veranda that had a retractable roof. Around Sukkah time he would make a Sukkah out of it by retracting the roof. He took a great deal of pride in this veranda. Everytime I would visit him he would be sure to show me that retractable roof. He was limping on one foot. As a young man he had a sledding accident, the foot broke, and it wasn't reset properly. As a result he was partially crippled for the rest of his life. My Grandmother was very fond of me. As I came in to visit them she would grab me and hug me and kiss me for several minutes. After the first day however they both slacked off and they didn't pay terribly much attention to me. They would introduce me to some of the neighbor boys and let me loose in the neighborhood to play. They would do one thing for me, though. There was a good sized walnut tree in the back yard. Grandfather would install a swing so that I could entertain myself.

He was a well respected member of the community. Being an Orthodox Jew, he went to the Temple daily. Every morning he would put on tefillin. People would come to see him to consult on their particular problems. He was almost like a Rabbi. He had a full beard and always wore a hat, a Hamburg, under which he had a little yarmulke, a little kipah. When he took off his hat his head was never bare. He even wore a yarmulke into the bath tub. I on occasion would take a bath with him in a huge cast iron tub that I won't forget to this day. I don't think I've ever seen a larger cast iron tub in my life.

He had a Grandfather clock in his bedroom. I slept next to him. As we got up one morning he decided to teach me how to tell time. He got up there in his nightgown and started moving the hands of the clock asking me what I thought. I didn't catch



on quickly enough and he was very disappointed. He burst out at me. "Well you're not as smart as I thought you were." I was devastated.

Then one day he hired a fiaker, the most popular mode of transportation at the time. It was a carriage with one or two horses. We were driven to Munkacs. He went to see the Munkaceve Rebbe, who was a very well known Jewish leader of the time. He had his "Royal Court" of his followers and it was not a simple matter to get an audience with him.

Be that as it may, my Grandfather managed to get us in. I remember a very crowded room and a very old Rebbe. He barely had any beard left. He was having his meal, and as it was customary, he would leave a small amount of food on the plate. This leftover was sought after by his followers, and usually ended up being sold to the highest bidder. I don't recall whether my Grandfather bid on it or not but he did get the Rebbe to bless me. I thought it impressive. Thereafter no one paid attention to me.

As I looked around the room it was full of various Talmudic books, Mishna and such. Underneath a bed laid a split tablet of the Ten Commandments. I don't know whether it was intentionally broken or whether it was a symbolic piece. Moses on descent from Sinai, when he saw the Golden Calf that Aaron built for the people, got so angry that he threw down the Ten Commandments and the tablets cracked. I thought maybe this was that symbolic piece that represented that event.

My Grandmother was extremely religious. She wore a wig, sheitel, as was customary with very Orthodox women. As I was able to put it together, she was the one that did not want to leave for America and that's the main reason why they stayed behind in Ungvar. Grandfather had two children in America before 1938. Mariska, Lilly, and Francis came just as the war started and there were plans for them to immigrate as well. Grandmother, being so extremely religious, was afraid that she won't be able to observe the Jewish tradition in America. She wouldn't hear about moving to America under any circumstances even though her one and only daughter was there.

The trains in those days were entirely steam driven. It was an experience to take the train with all the various associated noises, smells and smoke. There were three





classes of train fare. Usually we would travel second class which meant that we had our own compartment. Third class was used by the peasantry and I had occasion to take the train in the third class as well.

The peasants travelling these trains would be well supplied with food and snacks as they went along. Typically the train diet of a Hungarian peasant consisted of bread, cured bacon (szalonna), and raw onions. It would be quite an experience to watch them pull out their pocket knives, cut off a piece of bread from a large loaf, put a slice of bacon on top of it, very skillfully cut off a small piece of bacon, a small piece of onion, put it all on the tip of the knife and consume it that way. The bacon they ate was cured in salt and paprika. As far as I can determine, heart disease was unknown among these peasants.

My Mother usually had a live-in helper who would come from one of these peasant families. It was usually a girl about sixteen or so who would be hired out by the parents. My Mother would usually prefer to hire them fresh off the farm and she would have to train them. After about three or four days they would often get homesick, would start crying and my Mother would have to console them. We had a maids room for them which was adjacent to the Pantry. Some of these girls were brighter than others. After a year or so, the young maid would decide to leave and return to her home, so my Mother would have to start all over again training a new one. On market days the parents of the maid would come into town and visit the girl. At that time my Mother would usually buy their eggs, live chickens, butter, potatoes and whatever else they had to sell.

Later we also had some young Jewish women come and help my Mother with the household. I remember there was a very pleasant young woman by the name of Aranka, who was also a family friend. I was very fond of her. She survived the war, the concentration camp and she now lives in New York. I hadn't seen her in about 45 years till I met her at Aunt Zara's funeral, (in 1990.) On our meeting, the first thing she said to me was that she held my little brother Sanyika on the train to Auschwitz.

One day we acquired several pet pigeons. My Mother was at the market one day and she saw some live pigeons for sale. She bought them and after she brought them home we didn't have the heart to kill them. So we kept them, they were freed and





somehow or other they adopted us. They kept returning to our roof, we would feed them and they would take off again. After about a couple months of this, they disappeared and were nowhere to be seen. We made a number of inquiries of our neighbors. Finally the housekeeper of our next door neighbor confessed to the fact that she captured and cooked them. When our neighbor found out about it, they bought us a pair of gray doves. Somehow it wasn't the same. The housekeeper, Margit, was very fond of my younger brother Sanyi, the significance of which will become evident later.

Our triplex was on a street which also housed a rather large apartment complex. It was built for the civil servants. Over the years, as we would go to and fro, we would encounter various residents of this complex. There was one elderly couple who, I believe, were childless. They would notice us on the street, on occasion would chat with my Mother and compliment her on how well behaved her boys were. One thing led to another and pretty soon we befriended this couple. The couple had an upstairs apartment in this complex. As I remember he was already retired from civil service. They were very decent modest people, Gentiles, and I became fond of them. I would chat with them on the street from time to time and my Father would also become acquainted with them. More about that later.

As I mentioned earlier, we had a great American short-wave radio, to which we would listen incessantly. It was our main source of information. My Father had to pay a tax for the privilege of having the radio. This attracted the attention of the authorities. One day, they approached us to suggest that we should lend the radio to the Hungarian Secret Service so that they could monitor "foreign" broadcasts. My Father didn't dare to say no, and so the radio was lost. From then on we had difficulty maintaining contact with the news of the world. But there was information filtering through from time to time. We were getting solid information on the conduct of the war. We heard of the victory of the British forces in North Africa. We heard about the invasion of Sicily. We heard about the capitulation of the Italians and the new Badoglio government. It must have happened in the summer of 1943 because I remember that specific incident.

We had a very nice resort in Kassa which consisted of three very large swimming pools, various wading pools and manicured grounds. It was open to the general public. We'd pay the admission, checked in our clothes and go swimming in the



summertime. On this particular day, I went for a swim and came home not feeling well. I developed a headache from the cold water and I lied down on the couch in the living room. Mother came in and said I'll hear something that's going to make me feel much better instantly. And I wondered what that could be. She then told me that she'd just heard that the Italians are out of the war, capitulated, and it won't be long before it will be all over. I was elated, of course, and my headache disappeared. Unfortunately we were too optimistic about the war being over.

By the summer of '43 I graduated Grammar School. The educational system was organized differently then it is in America. We had four years of grammar school and eight years of high school. This meant that a ten year old was already enrolling in a high school which put him on a definite track in terms of a future career. There were three options. One would enroll in what was called Real Gymnazium - this was the gymnazium which would be preparatory for university entrance and would emphasize the sciences. Another was the Classical Gymnazium with emphasis on liberal arts. A third option entailed a business school-the "Polgári." My Mother always felt that I should go to a gymnazium because she wanted me to eventually go to University. My older brother Otto was being groomed to go into my Father's business. He was already attending Polgári, studying bookkeeping, languages and things of that sort. So, when the summer of 1943 rolled around I had to make a decision as to whether I wanted to go to the Real Gymnazium, or to the Classical Gymnazium.

My Mother graduated from the Classical Gymnazium. She studied Latin and was well versed in ancient and medieval history. As a child she was always telling me about the ancients. Since I was considered physically underdeveloped, she would always threaten with what the Greeks used to do to children who were not physically fit. She would tell me how the Greeks would put them up on the high mountains and feed them to the birds.

Due to the fact that there was limited enrollment for Jews in the Public Gymnazium, even though I had excellent grades, my chances of getting admitted were low. My friend Peter had an advantage over me. His father was a veteran of World War I and as a veteran his son would get preferential treatment under the Numerus Clausus quota system. As a result he was able to get into the gymnazium in Kassa but I was not that fortunate.





My Mother had cousins in a city in Transylvania. Nagyvarad had a very prosperous large Jewish community and a Jewish gymnasium, not only one, but two Jewish gymnasia. The Neologues and the Orthodox each had a one. The Gymnasium was of a very high caliber even though it was not accredited for University entrance due to discrimination against the Jews. Nevertheless, we felt that once the war was over, things would change and as long as I'll have a good gymnasium education, I will be able to get into the University.

My Mother approached the Mittelmans. The family consisted of an older gentleman, already retired, with his wife a son and three daughters. The oldest daughter was married. The son was away and the other two daughters were living at home with the parents. My Mother made the arrangements without consulting me. I was confronted with *fait-accomplis* and found myself, in the fall of 1943, packed off to Nagyvarad.

As I recall, my Father's salesman was travelling in that direction and he was given the task of dropping me off in Nagyvarad. I got admitted to the Orthodox gymnasium and got settled with the Mittelman family. The Mittelman's had a spacious apartment. One of the rooms was commandeered by the Hungarian Army and a Captain lived there. He also had an orderly. They were very decent and gave us no problems. The Captain became fond of one of the Mittelman girls, the younger one, who was a real beauty. I fell in love with her myself at the ripe old age of ten. She was red-headed, and had a very pretty face. She must have been about nineteen at the time.

The Gymnasium was very demanding. I would get up at the crack of dawn, go to school, say the Shacharit, then go to class and study a secular subject such as biology, Latin, Rumanian, Hungarian, geography, and mathematics. After about 2:00 in the afternoon, Hebrew and religious lessons would take over. I would get through by 5:00 or 5:30 in the evening. I was also selected for the choir. They discovered I had a good singing voice and I had to attend choir practice. I managed well and my grades were good. There was lots of homework. We would buy military type caps which we would wear as part of our street attire. That way we would identify one another. We took a great deal of pride in being students at this Gymnasium. We would salute each other as we met on the street.





At the beginning I was very homesick but I wouldn't let on. I just did the best I could to study and get into the routine of things. In the school I met a boy who was a refugee from Slovakia. He was staying with relatives down the street. He had a lot of trouble with Hungarian as he only spoke Slovak. He became a discipline problem and I felt very sorry for him. I tried to befriend him and help him with school work but I didn't have too much success at it.

I wasn't successful in making any friends other than acquaintances through school. On the advent of the Chanukah vacation, we had a couple weeks off. I was put on a train and went home for a visit. I checked in with my friends and especially Peter, of course. We compared notes about what we were studying and I was satisfied that he was not getting a better education than I was. But as it happened we became somewhat aloof. By this time he was developing another circle of friends and I became an outsider.

I returned to Nagyvarad and resumed my studies at the Gymnazium. About the middle of February 1944 I got up as usual and I prepared myself for school. As I walked the streets to the school, I sensed that there was something going on. Something that one could almost sense in the air. I didn't quite know what it was but by the time I got to the school I learned that there were Germans in the city and that they are displacing the Hungarian administration.

By the end of the day we knew that the Germans invaded Hungary and took control of strategic points throughout the country. All the major cities were occupied and the Horthy government was losing control of the country.

All this time the Horthy government was fighting on the Eastern front along with the Germans, Rumanians, volunteer French, volunteer Spaniards, volunteer Belgians and Dutch, even Norwegians. Hungarians were not particularly good soldiers. As I understand it, when the Russians encircled the Axis troops around Stalingrad, they picked a sector that was manned by Hungarians and Rumanians because they felt that was the weakest link in their defense perimeter. Be that as it may, the Hungarian government was difficult but not life threatening. As I understand it Horthy resisted the local Hungarian Nazis, the Arrowcross, the Nyilas. Their leader, Sálasi, was of Armenian descent. He a was fanatical fascist and



even the Germans thought of him as unreliable. He was imprisoned for a while because he was convicted of attempting to overthrow the Horthy government. Eventually he did get out of prison but was kept in the background. He considered himself a revolutionary fascist, that is, he had a social program which was essentially socialist. He was a rabid anti-capitalist. His manifesto can be found in a book published in the '60s by Professor Weber of UCLA. The title of the book is *Varieties of Fascism*. In the Appendix, one can find the Sálasi manifesto.

At this time the allies were bogged down in Italy. Tito was having some success with his partisan operation in Yugoslavia against the Germans. He was pinning down a very large German force.

Now a few words about underground operations in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Generally the underground organizations were dominated if not controlled entirely by Communist cells. These cells existed in just about every country. The Communists were especially well suited for underground operations because they had been under a great deal of pressure during the period preceding World War II. They were organized in secret so they were quite effective in underground operations against the Nazis. There were two exceptions to this rule of Communist underground control. One was Bohemia and the other Norway. In Bohemia, during the Nazi-Soviet honeymoon, prior to the attack on the Soviet Union, there was a great deal of cooperation between the Gestapo and the NKVD, the predecessor of the KGB, the Soviet Secret Police. As the Germans took over Bohemia the Russians wanted to prove reliable partners. They cooperated in rounding up the entire Communist underground organization in Bohemia. The net result was that when Hitler attacked Russia, the surviving underground organization was totally non-Communist, controlled by London. As a result the underground organization in Bohemia was very minimal. The population was docile and the working class had plenty of employment opportunities. The Skoda factories were working overtime. The Germans were treating the work force well and paying them good wages. There was very little resistance.

Early in the war the SS Commander, or Oberfuhrer, for the Bohemian protectorate as it was called, was a man by the name of Heydrich. He was a self admitted socialist who rose through the ranks in the SS and was in charge of Bohemia. The British decided to send in a group to assassinate Heydrich. Heydrich was assassinated while





driving to work on a Prague street. They threw hand grenades into the convertible and the seat material got embedded in Heydrich's back, he died a very painful death. Upon his death the Nazi's decided to severely punish the Czechs. They destroyed a small town northwest of Prague called Lidice. The men were all shot and the women and children were sent to Germany for slave labor. This was commemorated after the war when Lidice became a symbol of Nazi atrocities.

The second country that had no Communist underground was Norway. The Norwegian government on the eve of World War II had a Defense Minister by the name of Quisling. Mr. Quisling was a one-time Bolshevik. As the Nazi's invaded Norway, he became a turncoat and he formed a government under Nazi control. Thus, the term "Quisling" means traitor to this day. He succeeded in betraying all his comrades who would have been instrumental in forming the underground.

There was a strong Norwegian underground. There were partisan operations, but they were totally non-Communist and were controlled out of London.

In the early spring of 1944, we found ourselves under German control. It didn't mean that the Germans took over all the functions and controls of the government, but the Germans were able to put enough pressure on the Hungarian authorities to impose severe restrictions on the population. Think of it as Martial Law. Most of this martial law was directed against the Jews.

At the beginning they imposed travel restrictions. It was necessary to get travel permits. The Jews, of course, were not issued these travel permits except in very rare circumstances.

I was in Nagyvarad, about 200 kilometers from Kassa. I could not get on a train without a travel permit, and to get a travel permit was really out of the question. What to do? Many telephone conversations took place at this time between Mr. Mittelman and my Mother in Kassa. The telephone system worked even though we suspected that it was being monitored. Code words were used and words were chosen carefully.

My Father had a trusted employee who has been with him for a long long time. This woman was Gentile, and did packaging of paint on a part time basis. Mrs.





Garcsar had a son just about my age. She was very fond of me, and I suppose, when my Father presented her with my problem, Mrs. Garcsar volunteered to get a travel permit, get on the train and use her son's baptism certificate to get me back home. It happened therefore, that Mrs. Garcsar showed up one day in Nagyvarad and I was most happy to see her. I realized that she was my ticket home. As I recall, she even brought along some clothes of her son to disguise me. Needless to say, I was somewhat apprehensive about this whole idea but I had no choice. I realized that I had to get back to my parents because the future was becoming more and more uncertain. If we were to save ourselves by some scheme, we should all be together and determine what's to be done.

We got on the train, and as I recall, the train was full of people, mostly people from the countryside. A few miles out of the station there appeared a Hungarian gendarme (csendőő) along side a German soldier who held a submachine gun. They were examining everybody's papers. I was quite concerned that they were going to give me a close examination and perhaps they'll do more than just looking at the paper that Mrs. Garcsar had in her hand. As it happened, they barely noticed me. They went right by us even though Mrs. Garcsar held the papers in her hand. They barely glanced at them. And my excitement was for naught. We got into Kassa uneventfully, and I was reunited with my family.

Needless to say everybody was very gloomy. I checked in with my friend Peter and he brought me up to date with some very frightening news. The Germans have come to Kassa and contacted the Jewish community. They requested that the Jewish community organize a council with which they are to deal exclusively. This council was required to come up with a certain amount of money to be collected from the Jewish community of Kassa. The argument was, that they were not interested in harming the Jewish community but they did want them to get organized so that they can be communicated with. To fight the Bolsheviks in the Eastern front the Nazis were "certain" that the Jewish community wanted to do its share. They were "sure" that they would be "voluntarily" willing to contribute in a monetary way.

To be certain that this monetary contribution would be forthcoming they arrested a number of prominent Jews. They were to remain hostage until the funds are collected and until such time as the Jewish Council, the Judenrad, has been organized to their satisfaction. One of the prominent people in the community



with a high profile was my friend Peter's father. They arrested him as one of the early hostages. Now by the time I arrived, the hostage situation was resolved because the funds were raised and the Germans were satisfied that the Judenrad was in operation.

The Judenrad then was given instructions virtually on a daily basis. One instruction was that they are to organize all Jews into a ghetto. The Hungarian authorities designated a certain part of the town, an area which is very close by us, to be the ghetto for the Jewish residents of Kassa. The Jewish residents of the countryside were also to voluntarily transport themselves under guard from the countryside to Kassa. This same scheme was ongoing throughout the country of Hungary. Every city had a Judenrad and demands were placed on the Jewish population to contribute funds to the German war effort. They were organizing ghettos, usually in the County Seats, and all the Jews from the countryside were to be transported into these ghettos.

One of the decrees given to the Judenrad to execute was the wearing of the Jewish Star. The decree came very shortly after I arrived in Kassa, I remember within a few days we all had yellow stars and the instructions were that one had to wear the yellow star whenever in public, on the outermost garment. Some people took this rather lightly. When I went to visit my friend Kaufman Laci, I noticed that his mother was busy at her sewing machine making these yellow Jewish stars. She was making them quite artistic. She was embroidering them. She would actually make a business out of it as it was a really attractive looking Jewish star. They were desperate financially and she thought she could make a little extra money by doing this.

There was no end to the ugly rumors that were circulating at this time. One of them was that the Germans would liquidate the ghettos after they are fully organized and filled. They would deport all people to the Ukraine for resettlement. By this time, even though it was not conclusive that gas chambers and crematoria existed, (people didn't want to believe that) there was a great deal of concern about this so called "resettlement". Peter would tell me a joke that was going around about how two Jews decided to work together. One of them was going to be resettled very soon and the other one was going in a couple of weeks. The first one agreed that when he gets to his destination, he's going to write to his friend and tell him about the





conditions. But realizing that the Germans will probably censor whatever he writes they devised a code. If all is well he's going to write in BLUE INK. If things were bad he was going to write in RED INK. The man was soon "resettled". His friend received a postcard from him as agreed. The man wrote that everything was wonderful and the Commandant is a great fellow. He plays chess with him everyday. As a matter of fact, the Commandant was so nice that he promised that next week he's going to get him some RED INK.

The move was on for everyone to move into the part of town that was designated as the ghetto. It just happened that my father's business and warehouse was part of this ghetto area and so we were seemingly making plans to move to the ghetto. My Mother was very much concerned about Aunt Mariska's belongings. As I previously mentioned, when Aunt Mariska left for America, she left all her household goods behind. My Mother wanted to keep her promise to her. She organized a rescue for Mariska's belongings, specifically the big Persian rug that was allegedly a very valuable piece.

As I recall, around the corner from us there lived the Weiss family. They owned a house. My Mother convinced them to open up the floor in one of the rooms, dig a deep hole and bury some of our household goods along with their own. My Mother and the maid, carried this heavy Persian rug one night to Mr. Weiss's house along with some silver trays and other valuables. It all got buried in that hole.

My Father was not happy about this. He felt that we were taking considerable risk doing something this clandestine just for the sake of a few items which are of dubious value. He felt that if we are caught we could be resettled much sooner than what was scheduled. They had an argument about it, but already after the fact.

During these and earlier days I would, from time to time, see a peasant sitting in the kitchen waiting for my Father to come home. As I surmised, he was carrying letters of communication from my Uncle Moritz in Slovakia. If you recall the Slovakian situation was stabilized in about 1942 or thereabouts when the Germans got paid off. The Slovaks decided that they could not run the economy without the Jews. That is not to say that a large number of Jews of Slovakia hadn't already been deported by this time. I surmised that perhaps there's a plan being hatched between my Father and my Uncle Moritz on the Slovakian side. Lilly was still with us in Kassa and I





noticed that there was a lot of quiet discussion going on. Me being the ripe old age of eleven was not necessarily consulted on any of this. I surmised that we were going to hatch a plan and that we were not going to end up in the ghetto. The Nazi machine was designed to, at best, resettle the Jews, or at worse, as we heard through rumors, destroy us all.

For the average Jewish family there were very few options available other than going into the ghetto and hoping for the best. Any kind of resistance was out of the question. The Jews of Hungary were not trained militarily. They had no weapons at their disposal. They were not able to fade into the mountains and live off the land, certainly not with young children. This is not necessarily true of all the Jewish communities. The Polish, Slovaks, Ukranian and Russian Jews did fight back. There was resistance. There were some successes, although it was a very one sided situation in most cases. The Germans more often then not got the upper hand. If one thinks about my Father's dilemma, he was not the kind of person that could resist. This was true of everybody we knew. The only option was either to go into the ghetto, or go into hiding. Hiding in a small town like Kassa was simply not practical either for a family of six, with Lilly included. There had to be a third option!

Passover rolled around in early April. I believe it was the first week of April, just around my birthday. As we sat around the Seder table, I remember that my Mother was not feeling well. She was in bed and so we decided to put the Seder table into the bedroom at the foot of the bed. She was in a very ugly mood, and as the maid served the Seder dinner, my Father was very solemn. We all ate in silence.

My Father , at this time was fifty-four years of age. Otto was fourteen, I was eleven, Sanyi was six and Michael was two. My Mother was thirty-eight. I remember, as I sat there and wondered about the future, I had no doubt that I was going to survive. I didn't know about anybody else. I knew that whatever the future holds, somehow or other, I was going to manage and get through it. By this time, of course, we all knew that the Russians were not that far away and perhaps we may even be liberated in short order. However you couldn't count on it. As I recall, the deadline for moving into the ghetto was several days after Passover. Therefore, if we were to do anything, we had to do it quickly.



A day or so before the deadline, as I remember, we packed minimal belongings and left the apartment. We went to the family that lived next door in the complex that housed the civil servants. As you'll recall, I've described to you the Gentile couple we befriended. These people wanted to help us, but of course they had very limited means to doing so. They had a very tiny apartment. Nevertheless we decided that as the deadline approached we would stay with these people for just about a day until we can get organized in our escape. We spent one night at their flat, all of us together. The following morning my Father took me into the bedroom, closed the door and proceeded to tell me of the Plan.

The Plan was really a very simple one. It entailed Father, Mother, and Otto to escape to Slovakia. I was to stay behind in Kassa until such time as they get situated in Slovakia and then they will send for me. Same plan for Sanyi. He will also stay behind, and Lilly and Michael will proceed to Slovakia independently. In effect we were to break up into four groups and the plan entailed me staying with the Garcsar's at their house on the outskirts of Kassa. "It's all been arranged," my Father said, and since I knew Mrs. Garcsar quite well I did not think that this was a bad idea. I knew her son casually and I had never met her husband nor her daughter, but I had no doubt that I would fit in and the plan would work. By this time I got quite emotional, and not knowing how this plan will unravel, I started to cry. The one and only time I saw my Father cry was on this occasion. He started to cry too and hugged me and then wiped my tears. Then he opened the door and turned around to my Mother who was waiting. She proceeded to escort me downstairs and onto the street.

I think it was a Sunday afternoon. A cool nice, sunny afternoon, and as she and I walked toward the edge of town, she gave me further thoughts about what's going to be happening. She told me about how Sanyi was going to stay with Margit the next door housekeeper. I was surprised that they picked her for Sanyi. I frankly did not like her. As we approached the outskirts of town Mother said goodbye to me. She instructed me, as I approached the Garcsar's house, to open my overcoat, fold it over so that the Star of David which I was wearing would be covered. She also told me that they will send for me in a couple of weeks. A peasant will show up at the Garcsar's home with a picture, a family photo. She also made me memorize and repeat over and over again Aunt Zara's address in New York, 3400 Wayne Avenue.





I remember it to this day. If something went wrong and the peasant did not show, I will be in a position perhaps to get in touch with the family after the war.

We were both too engrossed in the Plan and an emotional farewell was a very quick one. I proceeded to approach Mrs. Garcsar's house with my huge overcoat now unfolded and the Jewish Star covered. And as I entered the house, Mrs. Garcsar greeted me with a smile. Her son Pista was there and greeted me too. Pista already wanted me to go outside and play with him. I told him that I was not ready to do that. Then Mrs. Garcsar instructed him to tell his friends or anybody else who asks that I'm one of his cousins from the provinces. I was feeling uneasy about Pista because I was sure that he did not understand the gravity of the situation. Since he knew who I was, he might eventually confide in one of his friends and that would put me in jeopardy.

Be that as it may, I had very few alternatives in this matter and decided to make the best of it. The house that the Garcsars lived in was quite comfortable. It had two bedrooms and a fairly good sized kitchen. It was a private home with a backyard and a nice picket fence in the front. There was no indoor plumbing. There was an outhouse in the rear, and the bathing facilities were limited.

I ended up sleeping in a big bed between Mr. and Mrs. Garcsar. It was quite uncomfortable because these people were not taking baths regularly and there were lots of body odors. They were by this time middle aged, both in their late forties. They were both heavy sleepers. The husband was a very strong personality. He was a machinist by trade, I took a liking to him right away. He was very strict with his boy but he would always wink at me and would be very gentle and kind.

As time went on, Mrs. Garcsar would always bring me the news from the city. Occasionally she would bring me a newspaper. The news was that anybody that hides a Jew was going to be punished severely. All Jews by now have to reside in the ghetto. Any Jew that was found outside the ghetto was severely punished and there was even talk about being shot on the spot.

As I read the newspaper one day, I came across an item about Mr. Weiss, our neighbor around the corner. Apparently he did not go into the ghetto either and he hid with his family. But after the city ghetto was liquidated and combined with the





larger ghetto organized in the brick factory on the outskirts of town, the Tégla Gyár, he tried to sneak back into his house. His house was being cased by the Hungarian police and they arrested him. And the way the article described him, he was a criminal Jew-black-marketeer whom the brilliant police managed to apprehend.

By this time all the Jews from the neighboring province and from the city were concentrated at the Tégla Gyár, the final ghetto destination in Kassa. The Tégla Gyár had a railroad spur which enabled the Hungarians and the Germans to load people into railroad cars for transport.

My hostess, Mrs. Garcsar, would come home every night from town and would give me further details as to what was going on. One day she came home and she told me, "My goodness! Your Father's warehouse, it took many, many days to clean it out. There was so much merchandise." I didn't particularly care for her remarks. Actually it couldn't have been that many days because by this time I'd only been at her house about a week. Apparently, she was trying to impress upon me that my Father was a very wealthy man. I wore a double- soled pair of shoes which was custom made. She thought that I had money hidden in the double sole and she kept asking me about it. I was not aware of any money in my shoes and I told her so. Her husband reprimanded her whenever she was doing this kind of thing.

One day she came home and I guess she heard some horror stories about people who got arrested for harboring Jews. She started to tell me that perhaps I should go to the ghetto, the Tégla Gyár, because no harm would come to me. "Who on earth would want to do any harm to a nice boy like you," she would say. I'd try to tell her that the Germans are gassing children. She just couldn't believe that that would be the case. After a while her husband would again intervene. He would say something to the effect that they had promised my Father that they will take care of me until someone shows up to claim me and he felt obligated to do so. Of course my Father compensated them quite well for this, I'm sure, but that issue did not come up. I felt very uncomfortable about this, I realized that this woman was getting scared. She had not realized what they were getting into. There were also rumors that there were house-to-house searches going on. As a contingency, Mr. Garcsar and I agreed, that if worse comes to worse, he would lower me into the latrine. Fortunately, it never did come to that.



One day, Mrs. Garcsar came home and said something to me about Margit, the housekeeper that was hiding my brother Sanyi. She said that she ran into her in town and that she had a great deal of difficulty with Sanyi. She finally had to give him up and he ended up in the ghetto. I was shocked to hear this. The story was kind of muddled and I tried to inquire further, but this was all the information she had. She informed me that Margit is going to come to talk to her and explain the situation. That distress me even further because if Margit betrayed my little brother, and she finds out that I am hiding with the Garcsars, I too would be at risk. I begged Mrs. Garcsar not to mention anything about my presence to Margit. When she came over I was in the other room. I was so concerned about her opening the door and seeing me that I hid under the bed.

What I was able to make out of the conversation in the next room was that Margit was unable to handle the young boy. The boy would get in the window, yell and scream about how he was a Jewish kid and how the parents had left him behind. In order to protect herself, Margit felt she had to turn him into the ghetto, lest she be arrested. I was not clear whether or not she was lying. I do know that Sanyi was difficult to handle at times. It is possible that he might have created difficulties for her and got her to panic. It's a tragic story. I don't know what I could have done. I don't know if the Garcsars would have agreed to have him join me. I feel that it was a tragic mistake to entrust Margit with the boy. The other option might have been to do the same thing as with Michael. That is to give him sleeping pills, put him in a hay wagon and have him transported to Slovakia. This is a great tragedy that we all have to live with.

As the days passed, the Hungarian authorities and the Germans liquidated the entire Kassa ghetto. Every soul was deported to Poland. According to Martin Gilbert's book *Atlas of the Holocaust*, the invasion of Hungary by the Germans took place on March 19, 1944. By April 15th, the ghettos were organized. Deportations started by May 15th. By mid-June 290,000 souls were already deported into Auschwitz, 14,000 of which were from the Kassa ghetto. The Allied invasion of France coincided with the peak of deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. Things happened so fast that I am amazed to this day at our good fortune to be able to escape the death net that the Germans created for us. On the 2nd of July, the Allies bombed Budapest for the first time, intending to give Horthy a message about the deportations.





By this time a lot of people in the West were getting information. It was finally beginning to sink in that what was happening in Poland to the Jews and others was not just propaganda. Up until now whatever news was filtering out of Eastern Europe about atrocities against Jews, the Slavs, etc. was discounted as propaganda especially by the British. There is a reason for this. In World War I, the British initiated a propaganda campaign against the Kaiser in which the Germans were accused of bayoneting babies. The British were not the only ones who fell victim to this concept of exaggeration, propaganda, and Zionist plotting. As I watched the Shoah documentary about the Holocaust on television some years ago, there were a number of witnesses interviewed. One of them was a high official of the Jewish World Congress who confessed that people like Stephen S. Wise, a well established Jewish figure in the United States, pooh-poohed the news about mass murder of Jews in Eastern Europe. He claimed that this kind of false propaganda is counter-productive and will create anti-semitism in the United States.

It was described in Shoah that the Polish government in exile in London sent a courier to Poland to investigate the atrocities. The courier was smuggled into an area near Auschwitz to see for himself. He was also smuggled into the Warsaw ghetto. He subsequently returned to London and reported to the Polish government on what he saw. As a result one of the officials of the Polish government went on the BBC and broadcast the information the courier brought back from Poland. Subsequently the courier was sent to Washington and was given an audience with FDR. The way this courier described the meeting, after he got through telling FDR about some of the atrocities that he had witnessed, FDR told him to go back to Poland and tell those Germans, "We are going to win this war and after we win this war, we're going to punish anyone that commits atrocities." This was the reaction of the British and the American governments to the rumors that were flooding out of Eastern Europe.

By the time the Hungarian Jews were being liquidated, it seems that there was a break in the attitude of both the British and the American governments. Unfortunately for most of us this was too little, too late. Foreign Secretary Eden informed Winston Churchill in early July as to what was happening to the Jews of Hungary. Churchill contacted FDR, who also contacted Stalin, and wanted to have





some quick action. The net result was the bombing of Budapest. It was ineffectual because the Hungarians were really not in control.

After the bombing, Horthy attempted to stop the deportations. By this time the only Jews that remained were Jews of Budapest. The deportations did stop for a while. Stalin never responded and to this day, whenever one talks about the slaughter of Jews in Europe, the question comes up about how the Allies didn't do a thing and how they sat idly by. We usually talk about the British and Americans. We expected the British and the Americans to bomb Auschwitz, to blow up the crematoria, to bomb railroad concentrations thereby making deportation impossible. If one looks at the map, one sees that there is quite a distance for Allied bombers to get to Auschwitz, find it, bomb it, and return over occupied Europe. The Red Army was much closer to Auschwitz and many of the other concentration camps. Nobody ever questioned why the Russians ignored all the extermination camps while they had much better information than anybody else. There were Partisan groups fighting in the forests not very far from these very concentration camps. Why was it that Stalin refused to do anything about it?

By the time most of the Hungarian Jews were deported from the countryside, a number of events took place in an attempt to save the remainder. There was a so called "rescue operation." I will get into some of those details later, but let me get back to my own story.

As the days passed, it seemed like an eternity, but actually I was only living with the Garcsars two or three weeks. I was somewhat aware that the ghetto had been liquidated. I was totally unaware of what was happening to my Grandfather and Grandmother in Ungvar, and various cousins in Tokaj, in Midszentmihaly, etc. I assume that they all got caught in the web. Finally one morning a peasant showed up at the Garcsar's front door. He presented a family photo. That was the arranged signal. I immediately prepared myself to leave with him. He brought along some of the type of clothing that was worn by the Hungarian and Slovak peasants. Basically it consisted of a very rough white cotton long pants and a white shirt. I said goodbye to the Garcsars and I was very glad to get on the road. We got on the train and the man had some papers which were adequate for the occasion. I don't recall too many details about the train trip except that it was not long and we got off at a small town.



As we got off the train at a very desolate railroad station we walked about a couple of miles to his village and eventually to his house. His house was typically a peasant hut which was prevalent in Eastern Europe. I guess "cottage" might be a more appropriate term for it. The walls were white washed with a little bit of blue in them and plastered thick. The roofs were typically made of straw. The inside floors were clay. It was a very comfortable house, with a big fireplace in every room. This was the summertime so it was not necessary to have heating. He fed me and put me to bed, it was probably about 7:00 or 8:00 by the time we managed to retire this first night.

Early the next morning, he woke me and he wanted me to go up into the attic. He was concerned about fieldhands, friends or neighbors coming in and seeing me. I had no choice but to agree and ended up spending my day in the attic. The attic was filled with straw, and being mid-summer, it got quite hot. In the evening when he got me down and he noticed how perspired I was. The next morning he decided he was going to put me in the barn.

The next morning bright and early I got into the barn which was a great improvement over the attic. After a while a young girl came in who turned out to be his daughter and she kept me company. Unfortunately she did not speak Hungarian. She spoke only Slovak, and since I spoke only Hungarian at that time, we weren't able to communicate. But I gathered she knew my secret. She tried to explain to me that she knows of some Jews in the village and she mentioned Zsidi, Palincsar, Zsid . I inferred from that, that Palincsar is usually the seller of alcohol or maybe distiller of alcohol . Palinka is the name for the local prune brandy, very popular with the peasantry. At any rate she was a very pretty girl, perfect facial features. She must have been about my age and she spent a couple of hours with me. It seems that I must of have spent two or three days at this peasants house before he was ready to transport me across the border into Slovakia.

One night he informed me that things were ripe for my departure. He told me that on or about midnight we're going to take a walk across the border. I was more than eager to proceed. We walked through the fields in pitch darkness. Finally we came to an irrigation ditch. He pointed to it and said, "You see this side is Hungary and this side is Slovakia," as we jumped across. So we were now in Slovakia. We walked all night, it seemed, and by early morning we approached the village, which





was my first destination. It was Sečovce. This was the home town of my Uncle Moritz. I knew that he was not there. The peasant took me down main street which was a poor excuse for a main street. It was really just peasant huts and a couple of stores. He knocked on the door of a fairly nice looking hut and a young man greeted us. The young man took me into the house and I met his wife. It turns out that they were one of two Jewish families still residing in Sečovce at this time.

They had a three room house. One room was the bedroom, the second was used for storage and the third room was large and had a huge table in it. Cloth stretched out along the length of the entire large table. It turns out that this young couple was manufacturing clothing for the local population. Since they were essential to the local economy the Slovaks let them stay. They must have been newlyweds. They were both very pleasant people to be around. The young woman was very nice looking and always in good humor. We all slept in one room, the three of us in one bed. Unfortunately they didn't have much privacy as newlyweds. I noticed in the corner rested a huge axe leaning against a wall with a very long handle. I asked him, why the axe? He told me, "One of these nights they're going to come after us, and when they do I'm going to take a couple of them with me with this axe."

The day after I arrived we got a long distance phone call from Uncle Moritz from Bratislava. He wanted to find out about my situation and for the first time he found out about the tragedy that befell Sanyi. I tried to tell him all I knew about it and he of course he was quite upset. By the way, the peasant that picked me up at the Garcsar's was also inquiring about Sanyi. He had instructions to pick him up at the same time. My stay with this couple in Sečovce was quite pleasant. We had good food and in the evenings we would chat a lot and he would entertain me with stories. After about a week someone showed up to take me to Bratislava. That was the place where my Father and Mother and Michael and Otto settled. They were successful in crossing the border right after we separated and we were able to reunite in Bratislava. I was surprised to see how openly I was able to board the train to Bratislava. It seems that Slovakia was fairly wide open at this time with very little interference from the Germans.

I got to Bratislava uneventfully. My Father waited for me at the railroad station but my memory is not too clear on that. Now let me describe our new home. We were





in Bratislava which was the capitol city of Slovakia. It's on the Danube. It's a very pleasant city and in the war years it was totally untouched by bombing or any kind of destruction. As I mentioned earlier, the Jewish community was stabilized by this time. The Germans were paid off and the Slovaks decided that they can't do without the Jews that remained. My Father, through my Uncle's connections managed to get himself a job as an electrician. I don't think that he knew too much about electricity. Nevertheless since he was an employed individual we had the appropriate papers. We were given quarters in a relatively new section of town.

Our residence consisted of a single room in a barracks complex. These barracks were essentially one story wood frame houses. They very small, about eight or ten of them surrounded by a fence, adjacent to a lumber yard. All the residents were Jews in the same situation as we were. People were employed as laborers or craftsmen. They would be legally protected because of their skills. My Father would get up every morning, get his lunch pail, go to work and reappear every evening about 6:00PM

When I met my Mother I was shocked to see her condition. She had a broken knee that was in a cast. Our living quarters was a very tiny room at the end of a narrow hallway. The room must have been about four feet by twelve feet at the most. It served as a kitchen, sleeping quarters, and eating quarters. Needless to say it was extremely crowded. I ended up sleeping in the narrow hallway.

The days were very hot and we were quite uncomfortable but we were very happy to be in Bratislava. My Mother started to interrogate me about Sanyi. She was very disturbed about the fact that I was not able to tell her much more then I had already told Uncle Moritz. I just didn't know any of the details. I had the distinct impression that she was disappointed that I did not do something and save Sanyi. I don't know what I could have done but whatever it was she expected me to do it. She complained a lot about her knee and she told me the story of their escape.

It seems that after we separated, they joined a group of other Jews all destined to cross the border to Slovakia. They rendezvoused with their guide on the outskirts of Kassa. There must have been about fifteen or twenty people and two guides. Friction developed as to which group should go first. Everybody was very anxious to cross the border. Some of the people offered the guides extra money so that they



could be put in the first group. Some people became very aggressive. Understandably the situation was bordering on panic. As my Mother tells it, the first group was promptly arrested by Hungarian border guards. By the time the second group reached the border, the guards assumed they had captured the entire group. The second group was able to cross the border undetected.

As they crossed the border they ended up in a small village in the middle of the night. In the dark, my Mother fell into a ditch. She either tore the ligament or broke her left knee which to this day gives her problems. The next morning, this created a great deal of difficulty for the group. She could no longer walk the rest of the way, but she hobbled as best she could with my Father holding her up. Shortly thereafter they got to a road and to their utter surprise and relief they saw Uncle Moritz approaching in a car to pick them up. They had to find a doctor to set the knee. I guess they really didn't get to do that until after they got to Bratislava. At this point, my Mother dressed up as a local peasant and was taken to the hospital. She pretended to be a deaf mute so that she could avoid any conversation while there. As soon as the cast was put on, she was taken out of the hospital, in order not to spend any longer than necessary in that situation. There was a considerable amount of pain associated with that broken knee. To this day, I can visualize her the first time I saw her in Bratislava, standing in the doorway as I approached, with a cast on her left leg. She was a pitiful sight.

As it turned out Michael and Lilly crossed the border the same night through a different route. Michael was given sleeping pills and Lilly dressed up as a peasant woman. They got on a hay wagon and crossed the border that way uneventfully. Michael succeeded in getting to Bratislava.

Life in Bratislava wasn't really bad. We had ample food. As time went on we managed to get a larger room on the other side of the hall. Initially it was full of parquet flooring. One of our friends from Kassa, Mr. Schwartz, who also managed to escape to Bratislava, was the laborer moving all that parquet so we could occupy the room. He was not particularly interested in getting the job done so it took us several weeks before we were able to acquire the larger room. I spent most of my time roaming around the neighborhood. Next door we had a good sized lumber yard (Drevo Sklad in Slovak). There was lots of lumber to play with. They also had narrow gauge railroad tracks which were used to transport the lumber. They used





small rail cars that would be loaded up with lumber. We would play with them after hours when the workers went home. I would also explore the neighborhood. There was what looked like a luxury apartment house down the street under construction. I roamed around the unfinished floors. One day I came upon another boy like myself also roaming. We became fast friends. His name was Mason Laci. I remember him to this day. He was a dark complected, round faced, chubby guy. When he found out that I was a chess player, we became inseparable friends. Pretty soon his father appeared and they invited me over to there house. We played chess and we spent many a day together. His father was an excellent chess player. He would give us lessons about certain openings. They were always in good humor. They were also Jewish. I guessed he must have been some kind of a civil servant. They had a nice modern apartment.

The evenings skies were becoming more active. There were a lot of allied aircraft overflights. There were a lot of air raids. There were no air raid shelters within our complex. We would just go outside if we were still awake and look up at the sky searching for the airplanes. There was no bombing. We realized that there was very little worth bombing in Bratislava. Although it was an industrial town, it was not significant industry. They had a solitary refinery at the outskirts of town. We would hear bombing in the distance, however. My Father would say that they must be hitting Vienna or Wiener Neustadt, an industrial area just south of Vienna. In the distance we saw what looked like a factory with a very tall chimney. When I would ask my Father whether that was some kind of industrial plant and he jokingly said, "Oh yes, it's a chocolate factory." To this day I don't know whether he was kidding me or not. As these air raids would continue we would just sleep through most of them.

One morning my Father informed me that there was an air raid during the night, and he thought that we were really going to get bombed. "Why did he think so?" I asked. He answered, "Because some of the airplanes dropped very bright flares that lit up the whole neighborhood." He assumed that since they were doing that, they were going to do bombing. But nothing of the sort happened. They just dropped that big flare and that was it. Later on we heard that they were doing this to celebrate the birthday of President Beneš, the President in exile in London.



By this time we were somewhat isolated from world events. We didn't have too much information, we had no radio, and the occasional newspaper that my Father would bring home was inadequate. I didn't know, for example, that the Normandy invasion had occurred and that it was a success. We didn't know too much about the Russian front other than we assumed that the Russians continued to be victorious and were pushing West. By August 1944, which is the period we're talking about, the Russians were outside Warsaw. They reached the Carpathian Mountains and were about a hundred kilometers from Auschwitz.

On the 26th of August 1944, there was an uprising by the Slovak partisans in Banská Bystrica, central Slovakia. The Slovak partisans did conduct military operations against the Germans starting about 1942. A lot of Slovak partisans were Jews. Many of them with families who lived in the forests and managed to occasionally attack the Germans or the Slovak army. Most of their efforts up until that time consisted of blowing up railroad tracks, railroad bridges and things of that sort. But by August 1944 these partisan operations became bolder. I suppose the Soviets were encouraging them by supplying arms for these groups. On the 26th of August there was a general uprising against German troops. In response the Germans came in force and brutally suppressed the uprising. At that time they decided that they're going to liquidate the remnant of the Jewish community in Slovakia.

Four and a half months after leaving Kassa we were back where we started. We had to escape the Nazi web once again lest we be transported to Auschwitz. My Father was resourceful enough to have a contingency plan here too. He, perhaps through Uncle Moritz, managed to get information on a contact to smuggle us across the border back into Hungary. We took the train to near the Hungarian border, probably my guess would be, sometime towards the very end of August. My Father made contact with a Slovak border guard who, he later told me, was actually a Czech. The Czechs were considered more reliable than Slovaks under these circumstances because they were anti-German. The border guard took us, my Mother, Father, Otto, Michael and I, in the middle of the night, to the border and we crossed safely to the Hungarian side. As I recall it was a very dark night. The man had a bicycle and he put Michael on the bicycle so we wouldn't have to carry him. We crossed the border a little after midnight. We walked a couple of miles and we saw the outskirts of a village, with dogs beginning to bark in the distance. We decided, that instead of entering the village in the middle of the night and waking up the whole







neighborhood with the barking dogs we would camp in one of the haystacks and proceed in the morning.

The plan was to try to reach Budapest. We already knew that the entire countryside in Hungary was without Jews. The only Jews that remained in the country were in Budapest. We have heard that the British are issuing entry papers to Palestine to a small number of people in Budapest and that the Germans were honoring these papers. Our hope was that perhaps after we get to Budapest, we'll be able to get one of these exit papers. We were also hoping that the Russians would break through and liberate us. As it happened the Russians got bogged down at the Carpathian mountains. They were trying for a break-through at Tatar Pass, one of the three passes through the Carpathians. The pass got its name from the Tatar~~s~~ invasion of Hungary back in the sixth century. The Germans were successful in bottling up the Russians at the pass. Just about the time we crossed the border back to Hungary, the Soviets forces accomplished a breakthrough through Rumania. The Rumanians decided that they'd had enough of the war and started negotiating with the Russians. As the negotiations took place the Russians took advantage of the lull and quickly occupied Rumania. They pushed to the South and outflanked the Carpathian mountains. By the 22nd of September they were pushing into the Hungarian Plains. Arad, a city in Transylvania, was liberated at that time.

Unfortunately for us though, the Russians soon ran out of supplies. They were unprepared for the successful Panzer move which extended their supply lines considerably. Even though they were already able to advance on Budapest in the absence of natural barriers, they did not have the resources to continue. They stopped to regroup in September. On the northern front, they made absolutely no progress towards Auschwitz which was fifty to sixty kilometers from the front. As it happened, this was about the time when Anne Frank from Amsterdam was transported to Auschwitz. She later died in Bergen-Belsen.

Auschwitz was in operation until the 20th of November at which time the Germans transported the prisoners to other labor camps.

On or about the 1st of September 1944, we found ourselves at the edge of a small village in northwestern Hungary. As we woke up and gathered ourselves out of the haystack, we had no choice but to approach the village. It must have been about 6:00



or 6:30 in the morning. We walked through the main street of the village. As we walked through we noticed a soldier partially clad, with a pail in his hand, walking across the street. He was sizing us up. It was obvious that we did not belong in that village and that we were not village dwellers. He approached us and wanted to know who we were, where we were coming from and where we were going. My Father responded that we are going to Budapest and that we are coming from another village nearby. What else could he have said? This wasn't enough for the soldier and he ordered us to follow him to the edge of the village, to the Hungarian border post. As we entered the border post we were confronted by the local commanding officer who started to interrogate us further and called headquarters for further instructions. His instructions were that he should place us under guard and march us to headquarters for further interrogation.

My Mother was a few months pregnant by this time and she didn't feel well. But we had no choice but to march under guard along the road to the County Seat. As we approached, people were out looking at us as if we were of another world. Here we were dressed, in civilian clothes under guard by the Csendors, the Hungarian gendarmes who operated in the countryside, with bayonets drawn. They were probably already told we were Jews. As we got to the Headquarters we saw there were a couple of higher-ranking officers sitting in the veranda awaiting our arrival.

As we approached the building, they welcomed us in a very threatening loud voices, "Here come the Jews. Welcome Jews. Come right in Jews." As we were then led in, they started to interrogate us. Basically the story my Father told them was that we did come from Slovakia, we were Hungarian citizens and that we heard about immigration papers being handed to Jews in Budapest. That's why we were trying to get to Budapest. The fact that we were Hungarian Jews, citizens of Hungary, we were hoping would prevent them from taking us back to the border and turning us over to the Slovak authorities.

My Father had his Hungarian citizenship paper with him which he promptly produced. That seemed to have satisfied them. However during interrogation they wanted to ascertain various aspects of our story, specifically the claim about us being residents of Kassa. As I recall, in order to ascertain that, they took Otto into a separate room and asked him about the various landmarks in Kassa. That established our credibility, vis-a-vis residency in Kassa. Once they established the







fact that we were Hungarian citizens, they had a dilemma. They didn't quite know what to do next. They did want to interrogate us further and as I remember the three of us, Father, Otto and I, ended up in the Captain's office. The Captain started to ask my Father about what his plans are all over again, especially about this business of going to Budapest and getting an exit visa to go to Palestine. My Father at this time decided that he will try to reach an "understanding" with this officer. He clumsily proposed that perhaps he should let us go. Once we get up to Budapest we could meet and since we had some money in a bank account in Budapest, he would be able to make a gift of some of it to the officer. The officer encouraged him to talk. After a couple minutes of this, the officer suddenly changed his mood and yelled out at my Father, "You're not trying to bribe me are you?" My Father, being the straight forward individual that he was, clumsily did try to bribe him. Unfortunately it didn't work.

After that outburst the officer's mood changed permanently. He sensed that we have money with us instead of just in Budapest. He asked us to strip, we all got down to our underwear. Then he had one of his orderlies come in and start looking through our clothes. We did have some Hungarian money sewn into the linings of our coats and such, and as the orderly found money, he would be instructed to strike Father. Everytime money would be found my Father would be struck. I knew that I had some money hidden in my clothes, so instead of waiting for it to be found, I decided to open up the seams. When the officer wasn't looking, I put the money on the desk in front of him so that he wouldn't strike Father. This went on for a while and Father wasn't very badly hurt but he was naturally upset by the whole thing. All three of us were standing just in our underpants for about ten, fifteen minutes. After, we were told to dress and the officers had a big conference. They didn't quite know what to do with us at this stage. •

After a few hours of this they decided that they should march us further into the town of Komarom. Komarom had the courthouse and a prison. They decided to turn us over to the civilian judicial system. I remember Mother was uncomfortable walking all these distances and the gendarmes who were guarding us didn't push us too hard.

We got into Komarom and they put us in front of a judge. The civilian judicial system was still in operation inspite of the war and the German occupation. Since



we crossed an international border illegally, both departing from Hungary to Slovakia, and returning from Slovakia to Hungary without appropriate papers, the judge sentenced us to sixty days in jail. They segregated us, Mother and Michael went to the Women's Section and Father, Otto and I ended up together in a cell in the Men's Section.

The prison was an honest to goodness dungeon with very thick walls, bared windows and heavy, locked doors. There was also a prison yard and plenty of guards. We ended up in a cell with a window into a hallway. We were locked in there with very little furniture except for a couple of mattresses, a couple of chairs and a small table. It was a very small cell, but we were nevertheless happy to be there. We felt that perhaps for at least sixty days we'll be safe in the Hungarian prison system.

Since I and Michael were under aged, both of us were allowed to receive food bought from the outside. The money was taken out of our funds that they confiscated. So as a result, twice a day as I recall, I would get some food brought in. It consisted usually of milk and sandwiches, and some hot cooked meals and soup. It was good food and since I was not a very big eater there was enough for Otto and my Father. The same thing was going on on my Mother's side. Michael would be permitted to have food brought in. The prison food itself was not that bad and as a matter of fact it was quite tasty. There was one food in particular which was a mixture of potatoes fried in onion, and noodles, (krumplis tészta.)

We would take daily walks in the prison yard for about a half hour. While in the yard I noticed a couple of prisoners who were in military uniform. They appeared to be American flyers who were probably shot down in the neighborhood. The Hungarians didn't know quite what to do with them. They probably didn't want to turn them over to the Germans, and put them in jail for safe keeping. We weren't able to talk to anybody in the prison yard and we kept to ourselves in this small cell.

There was a slot that was dug out from the wall to the adjacent cell. We were able to look into the adjacent cell and hear what was going on. The adjacent cell was filled with Gypsies who were in prison for various minor felonies. About a month after we arrived we acquired additional roommates, two men, also Hungarian Jews, who were also seized at the border. Their story was identical to ours. By this time of





course, the conversation brightened up a little bit. These two had some news about the outside world. There were lengthy discussions going on about the Russian front. One day we heard through this slot in the wall one of the Gypsies. He was listening in on our conversation, and overheard us hoping for the Russians to come and liberate us. He thought he would blackmail us because of this. He wanted some money. Of course we all laughed at this, but he was quite serious about this blackmail idea.

Towards the end of October 1944, our sixty day sentence was coming to an end. The Hungarian authorities had to release us. But since there were no longer any Jews permitted in the countryside, their only option was to transport us to Budapest, where there was still a large number of Jews being accumulated to form a ghetto. We were placed on a train to Budapest under guard with two gendarmes carrying bayoneted muskets.

The train was extremely crowded, full of civilians and army personnel all going to Budapest. Along the way the train stopped many times. On occasions, out in the middle of nowhere, people would get off the train to stretch their legs and relieve themselves. On one of these occasions, my Mother whispered to my Father as the guards were distracted. She suggested that he should just get off the train and try to escape and leave us behind. She thought our chances were better if we separated, she with the children, and him, being a Jewish male, going a separate way. My Father immediately rejected the idea, understandably so. No Father and husband would ever consider deserting his family under these circumstances.

We arrived in Budapest on a Sunday night as I recall. It was late in the evening when the gendarmes delivered us to a rather large prison complex in the center of Budapest. Since it was already after hours the reception area was deserted. The Sargeant at the desk accepted our custody from the two gendarmes who then departed. The Sargeant informed us that the clerks have gone home and we were going to have to spend the night in the reception area until morning when we'll be assigned a cell.

When Mother heard this, she got very upset and lost her temper. She started to scream and yell at this Sargeant who was totally taken aback. I guess he wasn't used to the idea of being treated this way in a prison setting and he was quite intimidated.



He started to become quite defensive. He got one of his superiors who explained to us again that there's nothing that can be done because it's after hours, we cannot be logged in and we cannot be assigned a cell. My mother again opened up on him telling him that he should be ashamed of himself, that we are young children and that she's pregnant, and that we've been travelling all day, we are hungry and we are tired, and we are not about to spend the night in this reception area.

To my surprise, the Superior agreed that this is not a fair treatment. He went back to the kitchen and got us some leftover beans and some bread. He then opened one of the offices which had a couple of desks, a table and a few chairs. He got us blankets and pillows. We ended up spending the night in that office which was superior to the reception area. The beans that he served us were awful. I remember I started to eat some of it and it was full of sand and pebbles. It was a very distasteful meal, but as I recall, we finished the beans anyway.

The next morning we were logged in and were segregated. Mother was placed in the female portion of the prison with Michael and I assigned with her. Father and Otto were placed in the men's side of the prison. Actually this was not a prison in the true sense of the word. It was a transfer facility where the prisoners would be held temporarily. It was called the "Tolonc Há<sup>z</sup>," which has a different connotation than a prison.

The facilities were quite adequate. We ended up in a large cell which housed fifteen or twenty people. It had a barred gate which was kept open in the daytime so we could go back and forth throughout the area visiting various cells. When night came the doors were locked. On at least one occasion, as I was roaming about, I managed to get over to the men's section of the prison and I was able to visit Father and Otto. They were also in a large room.

The food was adequate and we didn't particularly care too much about that. We were anxious to get ourselves released. Mother would press the jailer from time to time asking when are we going to get our release papers. He must have taken a liking to cute little Michael, because he allowed Michael to play with the buttons of his uniform. We expected to be released with instructions to go into the the ghetto.





From what I was able to see of the prison population they consisted primarily of petty criminals. I don't think there were any Jews other than ourselves. There was the usual number of Gypsies who were arrested for various reasons.

Parenthetically, the Germans had plans for exterminating the Gypsies as well. According to the data that Martin Gilbert presents in the *Atlas of the Holocaust*, published in 1982, there were 28,000 Gypsies transported to Auschwitz from Hungary. In addition there was something like 28,000 from Croatia, 36,000 from Rumania, 15,000 from Germany, 15,000 from France, 1,000 from Italy, 35,000 from Poland and 30,000 from the Ukraine also deported. However the campaign against them was not as well organized as it was against the Jews.

The Nazis apparently had a whole list of nationalities and ethnic groups that they wanted to exterminate. On top of the list were the Jews. After that came the Poles and the Ukrainians. After that came the Serbs and the Russians. They had a definite plan of action for eliminating the Slavic population in Eastern Europe in order to make room for German settlers. On the other hand they had a very good relationship with some Slavs like the Slovaks, the Czechs, and Bohemians, the Moravians, and the Croats in the Balkans. The Croats were permitted to establish an independent state as Nazi collaborators. The Baltic republics were of Germanic origin and were very sympathetic to the Nazi cause at least initially. They were promised independence from the Soviet occupation.

While we were sitting in prison waiting our release an unexpected and disastrous thing happened to us. At the time it was not recognized as such. On or about the first of November the Germans came into the prison looking for men to put to work on defense fortifications around Budapest. At least this is what they stated to the prison authorities. As my brother Otto related it, they came into the men's section of the prison and counted out a number of people of adult age and escorted them out. It was not clear at that time whether these people were going to be returning at night and recollected again the following day for further work. In any case, Otto instinctively lined up along my Father, preparing himself to depart with him. As it turned out one of the Germans pushed him aside telling him that he was too young for the job.



My Father was in this group that departed for labor outside the facility, never to return. When we found out about this, we were upset by this development but we felt that perhaps this was not as serious as it turned out. A work battalion within the city of Budapest, we thought, would probably not stray far, and we would be able to reunite with Father later on.

On November 10th, 1944 we got our release papers. We were told to go to the ghetto area at Pest and to take up residence there. They returned some of our money that was confiscated in Komarom and held for safekeeping. Once on the street, we ended up on a trolley car, and found our way to the Jewish section on Dohány Utca. It was already night time and the weather was turning cold. As I recall, we ended up in a courtyard adjacent to the large Dohány Utca Synagogue. It appeared to be the headquarters of the Jewish Council and also served as the Chevra Kadisha. As we walked through that courtyard we saw quite a few dead bodies, piled up on the side like so much firewood.

As we approached the office door, somebody asked us what we wanted and my Mother told them that we would like to see the person in charge. An elderly man came out and Mother told him that we are refugees and in need somewhere to stay. The man said that there's absolutely nothing available. But then he took a second look at us. We must have been such a sorry sight that he reached into his pocket and pulled out a key and said, "Look, take this key and stay at my apartment." And then he made a very curious statement. He started to talk about his son. "Heaven only knows where my son is rolling in the dust today," something to that effect in Hungarian. He gave us the address of his residence just a few blocks away.

It turned out to be a very nice modern apartment house, about four or five stories as I recall. On the third floor we entered a very attractive, nicely furnished modern apartment with central heating and hot and cold running water. The first thing we did was take a hot bath. We took care of our hygiene requirements. By this time we had acquired lice. Mother would check our collars and would find these little ticks, or whatever they were, and she would rub them and destroy them that way. Finally we all ended up doing our own shirts and the rest of our clothing searching for lice.





It seems that there were a couple of other people staying in this apartment, a couple of younger women who were also refugees. The owner of the apartment never came by. We had the freedom of the place for a couple of days.

A few words about the city of Budapest. Budapest is actually two cities combined about 250 years ago. Buda is on the west bank of the Danube. It used to be the seat of the ancient Hungarian kings and contains the old city and its fortifications. It's hilly and suitable for defensive action against an invader. The Pest side, on the east side of the Danube is all flat and it's difficult to defend. We were staying on the Pest side and the Jewish quarter was about three blocks away from the Danube riverbank. The Danube is quite wide at Budapest. There are a number of bridges crossing it. Budapest was a beautiful city and it still is. Any Hungarian will quickly volunteer the fact that Budapest is the Paris of the East. Of course the Rumanian will tell you the same thing about Bucharest.

As a child of about five or so, I did visit Budapest for a couple of days on an outing. It was a big event in my life because it involved getting on a train for about three, four hours and staying in a hotel. I recall vaguely some of the aspects of my visit. We did go on the subway which was very exciting. There also used to be a kind of a early Disneyland called the Angolpark. It was located on Margit Sziget, a large island in the center of the Danube at Budapest. As a child I recall vaguely that I was there once. If that is not the case then I'm sure that I'd heard much about it over the years. It seems that everytime my Mother wanted to promise me a good time she would tell me, "Well, we're going to go to Budapest and we're going to take you to the Angolpark." In any case, I had been in Budapest once before because I did remember the subway cars and how they ran underneath the city.

The Budapest that appeared to me in 1944 was a city crowded with people. There was the usual Hungarian population which consisted of as much as 25% Jews. The city used to be referred to sarcastically as Judapest. In addition, there were at this time a large number of refugees from the countryside escaping the Russian advance. Propaganda had it that the Russians were very hard on the Hungarian population because of the atrocities that were committed in the Ukraine by Hungarian troops. Then there were the refugee Jews from the provinces who had the connections to smuggle themselves up Budapest. Among these, I later found out, were our cousins from Tokaj. Irene and her four children and her husband Yankel. We did not know



that they were in Budapest at the time. In addition to that, there was the Hungarian Army preparing for the defense of the city. Actually the defense was primarily directed by the German Wermacht and the SS. Then there were the Hungarian fascists, the Nyilas. The local population was trying to prepare itself for the seige that was coming. The stores were full of people stocking up with whatever food there was still available.

The Nazi's were patrolling the streets and would stop people randomly. They were searching for straggler and deserters. Then there were the Nyilas patrols. These were people primarily in civilian clothes with a Hungarian army cap and side band with the Arrowcross. Some of them had rifles, others had a pistol or some of them didn't have any weapons. They were checking people, and of course, always looking for Jews.

The street cars were still operating. There was power and water still available. But in the distance you could hear the rumbling of the guns. The Soviet artillery was being heard quite distinctly on a periodic basis. At the front on the east, the Russians were still about 50 miles or so from Auschwitz. That front did not seem to move at all. The main advance was occurring much further south in the Hungarian Plains. Szolnok, which is a large Hungarian city southeast of Budapest was liberated on November 4th, and the Russians linked up with the Yugoslav partisans.

A few days later, one morning I was still half asleep, when I heard my Mother say that the apartment building at which we were staying was being vacated by a Razia. As you'll recall, Razia was a police action which consisted of a line-up and identification. She, of course, was very concerned about this. The building we were in had a large courtyard and everybody was required to come down and line up there. She decided that Otto and I should stay behind in the apartment and take our chances of an apartment-to-apartment search. She and Michael would appear in the courtyard for the Razia. As I recall, we had a couple of large stuffed sofas in the living room and we pushed them away from the wall. We planned to hide behind the sofas in the event they come in and searched.

The whole building was vacated except for the two of us. By mid-afternoon we had yet to hear from Mother. There was a knock at the door, as I recall, a man appeared





with a hand written note from my Mother. The note told us that she was all right and she suggested that we leave the apartment and proceed to a Red Cross orphanage at another location. After sundown, we snuck out of the building and proceeded to find the orphanage. It took us some time to locate the street since we were not familiar with Budapest. We had trouble finding people that were willing to stop and give us directions. Be it as it may, we did finally locate the orphanage. As I recall, there was a large chain link fence with a small crawl hole in it. We climbed through the hole and snuck into the building. We did not check in through the official channels. We just mingled with the kids. There were wall-to-wall kids, mostly unattended. It was havoc. I don't recall too much of the details, but we stayed there overnight.

The next morning my Mother showed up and we left the facility together. We got on the trolley and but really were at a loss as to where to go next. We certainly couldn't go back to that apartment. Mother had a narrow escape from the Razia, which I'll describe later, so it was not safe for us to return there. We certainly didn't want to move into the ghetto, which is what we were supposed to do. We decided to take our chances on the streets, and find shelter somewhere. Mother ended up standing next to a middle aged woman and she engaged her in conversation. My Mother was telling her how we are refugees from the countryside and we're looking for a place to stay. She was very gracious and offered to take us to her apartment building. She said that there were few people that may be able to take us in for a few pengő's (the currency of Hungary.) So we followed her to this old apartment building in the east side of Pest. As I remember, the first night she actually put us up in her kitchen and living room.

The next morning she introduced us to one of her neighbors, Mrs. Roth. Mrs. Roth decided that she would also help out and have a couple of us sleep over there the following night. To the best of my recollections, Otto and I spent a night at Mrs. Roth's. She was on the same floor as this previous lady but a few apartments apart. Her apartment was smaller. Mrs. Roth was a widow and her deceased husband was Jewish. She lived with her daughter, about sixteen at the time. She had a round owl-like face and wore large glasses. She wore this gray uniform which was characteristic of civil service employees in Hungary. It turned out that her husband worked for the Civil Service and she was living on a pension from the government. At any rate, we took a liking to each other and three of us became fast friends.



As I recall, my Mother was not comfortable in this situation. We were just not prepared to stay very long. During the day we would take a look around in the city. We started walking the streets aimlessly. Often we noticed people being stopped and being asked for identification. That made us feel very uncomfortable. Once we ended up in a Cafe which was still open. They were serving little else but hot water with a little tea in it. As we sat at one of the tables, it was very crowded, soon the door opened and a couple of the Arrowcross (Nyilas) young men came in, stood by the door, and started to survey the scene. They were examining each table from a distance. I got very upset by this and started to pull on my Mother's sleeve, trying to get us all out of there. We left in short order. As we started to walk the streets, I felt, and I made my feelings known to Mother, that it was too risky for us to be on the streets. I suggested we that find a new place, stay put and keep out of sight. I think she agreed with me but, was not that concerned.

I don't recall all the details, but we found a Swedish safe-house not too far from the Keleti Pája Udvar. Mother thought that maybe I should just stay there on my own until we figure out what to do next. I ended up walking into this safe-house. It had a large Swedish flag flying at the entrance. It must have been a private school during normal times because it had a huge gymnasium with charlie horses, rings and parallel bars. These were all pushed into a corner, and the whole gymnasium was used for sleeping quarters. Gym pads were being used as mattresses. There were wall to wall people, adults and children. I stayed there for about two or three days. I recall that I wasn't terribly comfortable. It was crowded, people were smoking and generating a lot of very thick smoke. Most of the adults played Gin Rumi all day long. The kids would just roam. I spent my time looking at the card hands people were playing. We did get three square meals a day. Since this was an organized situation, I felt uncomfortable even though it was allegedly protected by the Swedish Crown.

Let me back track here a little and talk about what happened to my Mother when she was arrested at the apartment house by the Razia. The way she described it, after the people were gathered in the courtyard downstairs, they were taken under guard to a square down the street. There, an officer was examining the papers of each individual as their turn came. When my Mother's turn came she decided to play dumb. She told the man that she left all her papers in the apartment building and if







he would only let her go back there she would produce them. The examiner fell for it. He called on one of the Nyilas young men to escort my Mother back to the apartment building to find her papers and bring her back. My Mother and Michael, and the armed Nyilas started walking back to the apartment building. As my Mother tells it, as they approached the corner, she decided to make a run for it. She ran around the corner and hid in a doorway. The Nyilas didn't spend too much effort looking for her. He ran right by the doorway and lost her. Needless to say this was very fortunate. There's no telling what would have happened to Mother and Michael without the appropriate papers. whatever those appropriate papers might have been at this time. Her cover was that she's a refugee from the provinces. She might have had to produce some documents from the provinces, I don't know. In any case, she spent the night somewhere away from the apartment house. It wasn't very clear to me how she managed that night but the next day she showed up at the orphanage to claim us. From then on, we were together until now.

While I was staying at this Swedish safe-house, I heard rumors about how the Swedes were setting up a number of these safe-houses. They were attempting to protect Jews from the Nazis and I heard talk about a "pass" they were issuing. When one got a hold of one of these Shutz Passes, the Nazi's would not bother you. It sounded too good to be true, and I wanted to leave that facility. The next time my Mother showed up, I told her that I would like to leave and perhaps go back to Mrs. Roth. She agreed. Mrs. Roth and her daughter welcomed me back. We asked her whether it would be all right for me to stay with them for the duration. They were very happy to accomodate. I slept in the kitchen and we had great times together. She wasn't working. She, her daughter, and I would play card games. I would show them some of my card tricks. We sang and played games. There wasn't much else to do.

Soon thereafter, all of the tenants of the apartment building, us included, decided to move to the cellars, and set up residence there. The shelling became more intense and there was fear that the building may be hit either by a bomb, a shell or by mortar fire. The cellars were quite spacious. There was room for everybody. They all brought down their mattresses and claimed a place on the cellar floor. These cellars were commonplace in Eastern Europe. They were used for storing firewood and various other things under normal circumstances.



During our wanderings on the streets of Budapest we often observed the goings on of the Germans. The Germans were preoccupied by working on defenses. They were setting up anti-aircraft batteries. There were lots of trucks, a few tanks and artillery pieces along the streets. I noticed some strange-looking large metal canisters. Some of them had parachutes attached to them. I concluded that the Germans were now cut off, were being supplied by air, and that the Russians have surrounded the city. The Battle for Budapest was imminent.

On the streets we also saw large posters showing the Vengeance Weapons that the Germans were hurling against the British. After we left our home in April, we were really not able to get too much detail as to what was going on in the war fronts, especially not on the western front. We surmised that there was an invasion in France and also surmised and hoped that there were successes, but we weren't sure as to where the front was. Thinking about these vengeance weapons was quite disconcerting. The V-1 was a pilotless aircraft and the V-2 was a rocket.

Let me give a little more information on this because this was a very important development not fully understood at the time. The V-1's were launched against Britain in the early part of '44. These were unmanned, unsophisticated ram-jets and would fly at about 200-250 miles an hour. They were launched from the French coast originally. They were inertially guided and were not terribly accurate. They would "putt putt" along, when out of fuel they would fall to the ground. There would be a large explosion. The British, though terrorized, were able to counteract these pilotless aircraft by shooting them down or by catching up with them in flight and flipping their wings a few degrees. The guidance system would then malfunction and the missile would crash. The V-1 turned out to be not much of a problem for the British. The V-2 rocket was a guided missile which went exoatmospheric and was impossible to intercept. This missile had a much better guidance system. It was directed primarily at London, whereas these V-1's were directed at various cities. My impression was, up until very recently, that these V-2's were few in number. Actually as one visits the War Museum in London, one finds that there were many thousands of V-2 were dropped on London. The devastation was horrendous. Imagine if the Germans would have had an atomic bomb or two. That could have ended it all for us. They would have been the victors.





At this time I would like to say a few words about the German effort to develop the atomic bomb. The Germans had a program to develop nuclear energy, not necessarily a bomb. The Germans were leaders in nuclear physics. They performed experiments with uranium in 1938 and discovered fission, that is, splitting uranium and generating energy in that fashion. When the news of this development reached New York, the scientific community in the United States was alerted to the implication of this experiment. Specifically, a Hungarian scientist by the name of Leo Szilard speculated that it may be possible to assemble a new type of weapon using the energy released by uranium through fission. Thus Szilard and a few others decided to alert the United States government to this possibility lest the Germans develop this weapon first.

Szilard and a few of his associates composed a letter to be addressed to FDR to alert him. In order to give maximum weight to this letter, they approached Einstein who was, by this time, a refugee from Nazi Germany living in Princeton. As the story is told, Szilard and Teller drove out to see Einstein with this letter prepared for him. Einstein signed it and the letter was then transmitted to FDR. Fortunately, FDR took it seriously. The Manhattan Project was organized under U.S. Army Lieutenant General Groves, who was the man previously in charge of the construction of the Pentagon. To make a long story short, as we all know, the United States did manage to build the atomic bomb by August 1945, when it was first tested.

On the German side, after the experiments were evaluated they soon understood their implications. Providing for electrical power generation was their primary concern. Of course they also realized that it could be used for explosive purposes. The Germans were short of oil. Their main source of oil was Rumania, Ploesti. They were planning to break into the Caucasus and get oil from there as well as to conquer the Middle East through North Africa.

Since they had a number of people extremely competent in nuclear matters, the refugee scientific community in the United States was very concerned. There was one scientist in particular. He was a good friend of Einstein. Heisenberg was approached with a proposal to get him to immigrate to the United States. He wouldn't hear of that. Then they tried to interrogate him as to whether he was going to be working on the nuclear program. He was non-committal. As time went



on, the Germans did some analytical work on the compilation of an atomic pile, the first step to establish a self sustaining chain reaction. They calculated that graphite was not a suitable material for compiling such a pile. This was a very important finding because it put them on the "heavy water" track.

A little bit of a technical explanation here. It seems that as uranium splits, neutrons are generated, about two and a half. As these neutrons are "born" they collide and split other uranium nuclei. For each of these splits there are two and a half neutrons generated. Soon things build up into a chain reaction. The question that needed to be answered was whether this chain reaction will self sustain. Are two and a half neutrons sufficient to generate an increasing chain reaction or are some of these neutrons going to get "lost"? Will the net result be that the reaction will just die out? In order to allow for these neutrons to do further work in splitting further atoms it was necessary for them to be "slowed down". They are "born" at a very high energy level, and at that "speed" they "miss" the atoms in their proximity. If they "slow down" sufficiently, they are able to hit nucleus targets more readily. That's when the reaction becomes more efficient and self sustaining.

The material that could be used for "slowing" these neutrons down are few and far between. The neutrons have to be "slowed down" but not be "absorbed". If they are absorbed, they are lost to the reaction. They have to be "slowed" to a point and then be made to hit another uranium target. These slowing down materials are referred to as "moderators."

When the Germans looked at this problem, they erroneously concluded that carbon (graphite) was not suitable. Hydrogen, specifically heavy hydrogen (deuterium) an isotope of natural hydrogen, was selected. Without deuterium therefore, they couldn't put together a self sustaining chain reaction experiment.

As luck would have it, there lived in Chicago a refugee scientist from Italy, Enrico Fermi, a Nobel Laureate. When he accepted his Nobel prize in 1937, he decided he had enough of fascist Italy. He settled in the United States with his Jewish wife.

Dr. Fermi performed some experiments in the '30's which made him familiar with the characteristics of carbon as it relates to neutron "moderation." So, when the decision came for putting together an atomic pile to test the self sustaining chain





reaction concept for uranium, he already knew that graphite was a suitable material. He didn't have to concentrate his energies on the heavy hydrogen or heavy water. His experiment using a graphite-uranium pile at the University of Chicago made history.

The problem with heavy water is its rarity. It takes a great deal of effort to manufacture it. The Germans were put on the "heavy water" track because their calculations indicated that graphite was not suitable. There was speculation after the war that perhaps there was sabotage on the part of some of the top German scientists who intentionally miscalculated. Indeed as these calculations were later reviewed, it was found that someone slipped a few decimals here and there.

The first story of the German effort to develop nuclear energy during World War II was described in a book titled *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns*. Unfortunately I don't remember the name of the author nor the publisher. Because of this error of discounting carbon, they concentrated on the production of heavy water. This entailed a very tedious process which requires a great deal of electrical energy to pump the water over many diffusion stages. In order to get an abundant source of electric power, the Germans transferred this operation to Norway. The Allies were able to get this information through Norwegian underground sources. As a result, the heavy water plant in Norway was bombed, but without success. Then a special Commando group was sent from England. The plant was put out of action for a while, but the Germans managed to quickly put it back on line. They managed to produce a large quantity of heavy water which was then subsequently sabotaged. As it was being transported across one of the deep fjord's from Norway to Germany, a commando group got on board the ferry and managed to sink it in deep water. Thus the German effort to develop nuclear energy was stopped in its track. As it turned out, the last remaining heavy water was smuggled out of Germany in 1942 when the great Dutch physicist Neels Bohr escaped aboard a British submarine.

The Germans were more successful in developing their rocket weapon, the V-2. The V-2 was in development for four years at least. It was a revolutionary concept in that it was using liquid fuel propellant. The way I heard it, Hitler was ready to cancel the program about two thirds of the way through because there were a number of failures. Desperate, Von Braun decided to compile a film on the entire



program. When he presented it to Hitler, Hitler had a change of heart and funding was restored for the project.

By the middle of December 1944, the Allied Armies were already on German soil. Aachen was taken and fighting was reduced to a slower pace. With the approach of the December holiday season and the Allies line over extended, there was need for a pause. On the 16th of December, the Nazi's mounted a horrendous counter offensive in the West. The Battle of the Bulge was on. They attacked on a forty mile front, between the 1st and 3rd U.S. Armies and made rapid progress to the West. The objective of the Germans was to break through to Antwerp, thus cutting the Allied lines in half, and encircling the northern wing which included most of the British forces and part of the 1st U.S. Army.

Preparations for this offensive were done in great secrecy. It was a complete surprise to the Allied command. One may wonder why that was if the Allies had access to the German army codes, the "Ultra" as I mentioned earlier. In this case the Germans were taking extraordinary precautions in the preparation and assembly of this offensive. In order to keep the Allies from becoming suspicious, they kept all military radio traffic at a normal level. They used couriers instead. There was no occasion for interception and decoding.

Fortunately for us The Battle of the Bulge failed. The Germans were thrown back. The big disadvantage the Allied forces had was that the area was in heavy fog for a period of time after December 16th. The Allied Air Forces were not able to support ground troops. By January 16th, 1945 the Germans were back to where they started and The Battle of the Bulge was over. This was their last major effort in the West.

Of course we didn't know about any of this as we were trying to survive in Budapest. Our concern was the day-to-day struggle and we tried to make the best of it. By now we lived in the cellars day and night. I came up periodically for air and to check out the street, but all of life's activities were now under ground. Mother, Otto and Michael were drifting from place to place, but I remained with Mrs. Roth and her daughter in the cellar. I had myself a little corner where I would sleep.

There was virtually no food available. I had no food of my own so whatever Mrs. Roth was able to throw my way is what I had. But, as it happened, I never felt





hungry. I wasn't thinking of food. I was primarily concerned about and very much aware of all activity that was going on around me whether it was in the cellar or up on the street or up in the skies. I often didn't know where my Mother, Michael or Otto were. They drifted away and I assumed that they were able to find a suitable hiding place for themselves somewhere.

Soon Otto did come by to visit. He told me that they're managing and that I should just stay with the Roth's. I remember telling him that it would be much wiser for him to also stay off the streets, get to his hiding place and stay put. I didn't think that this is going to last much longer and that the Russians will be along shortly. He was very hungry, and I remember, I had some leftover beans that Mrs. Roth gave me and so I gave that to him. He ate it up in short order and then left.

The situation on the street became more and more hazardous. There was a lot of shelling. The building we were in got hit, probably with a mortar. It was not major damage, but two or three days later, bricklayers showed up and repaired the building. We were located near the Keleti Pályá Udvar, the Eastern railroad station of Budapest. My address was Jobágy Utza 15. The station was being shelled from time to time. However it did not appear to be of much military value. There weren't any trains from the East by this time. I did confirm that the city was indeed surrounded and that the Germans were in desperate straits. They had no access to further supplies, at least not by ground transport. To supply by air was quite difficult because the Russians had superiority of the air. It was just going to be a matter of time before this thing will be over, I thought.

One morning, in late December, Mrs. Roth informed me of unusual activity on the street during the night. I asked her what was going on and she said, "Well why don't you go and take a look for yourself?" I soon climbed up the stairs, went up to the street and I saw what she was referring to. There must have been about thirty bodies lying in the snow. They were spread from one end of the block to the other. A couple of bodies lay near the corner. During the night these people were brought there by the Germans and were machine-gunned. Most of them appeared to be in uniform. They must have been deserters and stragglers the Germans caught.

The New Years came and went. We were now in the year 1945. The shelling continued. The building was hit again, the damage was minor but things seemed to



be intensifying. There was more frequent shelling, more machine gunning and it seemed that things were coming to a head. The days passed and everything seemed unchanged. Shelling, machine gun fire, explosions, more shelling, more machine gun fire and more explosions.

Few would venture from the cellars. January 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, still fighting - no change in the situation. The 11th, 12th..., the morning of the 13th about 8:30 AM two soldiers appear at the cellar door. They both held submachine guns and were yelling, "Nemci.. Nemci.." We were confronted by what I later found out to be a Rumanian soldier backed up by a Russian. Holding submachine guns at the ready, they look around the cellar trying to flush out any Germans that might have been there. We just stood there petrified. There was nothing to do but stand still.

Soon a few more soldiers appeared behind the first two. They proceeded to search the cellar from corner to corner looking under every blanket and every bed until they satisfied themselves that there were no soldiers in hiding. Then, as quickly as they appeared they disappeared. I remember that I was concerned that perhaps these troops could be thrown back by the Germans. Therefore I was very careful not to show any expression of gladness or joy, lest I give away my feelings. I remained in this kind of mode for several hours until I knew that the Germans were indeed thrown back and they were not about to retake our block. I, with many others by this time, went up on the street and took a look around. To my surprise there was very little destruction. Our street was very much like it has been for the last several weeks. It was now filled with more Russian and Rumanian soldiers. I saw a few horse drawn military wagons. The fighting has now passed us and I had the impression they'd already reached the Danube.

Let me say a word about the Rumanian soldiers. As it happened, the Rumanians capitulated in the late summer of '44. One of the conditions for their Armistice was to fight side by side with the Russians to the Danube. Thus Rumanian soldiers were put on the front lines backed up by Russians. They fought into Pest. The first liberator I saw was actually a Rumanian.

And so it came to pass that nine months almost to the day after we split up in Kassa, my ordeal had come to an end. By mid-afternoon of that day, and I believe it to be January 13th, there were quite alot of people on the streets. I noticed that there was a





large group heading towards Keleti Pálya Udvar. I decided to follow. There was no more shelling. The Germans were bottled up in Buda across the Danube.

The railroad station was a huge structure, a tremendous amount of space, lots of high arched ceilings, very impressive. I had never been inside before. I followed the crowd and soon I found myself at what appeared to be a warehouse. In the warehouse, people were climbing all over the place. There were large packages on the shelves that were already torn open. To my surprise, I found all kinds of food stuffs that were in scarce supply. I found chocolates, wafers, cookies, sugar cubes, saccharine and things of that sort. even sardines. as I recall. I gathered up as much as I could carry in my hands. Eventually I got hold of a paper bag and got a fairly good supply of these goodies. People were pouring in behind me. It was a free-for-all. I knew it wasn't going to last too long. I ran back to my cellar and hid my loot under my blanket. I then made a second trip. There I noticed some Russian soldiers trying to open, what appeared to be, a safe room. They were trying to blow or shoot its doorlock open. In the meantime the civilian population was looking through all the stuff that was spread on the floor and on the shelves. I noticed a couple of people looking at boxes of medicines. I found a box that contained more saccharine and I took more of that. By the time I got around to some of the other boxes there wasn't very much left. I was able to find two or three additional boxes of cookies or wafers. I returned home in triumph. I was quite happy with my little collection of treasures. I kept the loot well hidden.

A couple of more days passed. I was expecting Otto, my Mother or all of them to show up. I began to be somewhat concerned when this didn't happen after a couple of more days. I mentioned to Mrs. Roth that maybe I should be going out and start looking for them. At that time she informed me that she knew where they would be. She gave me an address and suggested that I go there. As I was able to put it together, on Otto's last visit, he gave her an address where we could rendezvous after it was all over. I suppose it was a wise to keep it from me. Should I have fallen into the hands of the Germans or the Hungarian Nazi's they might have gotten it out of me. There was no way of telling what could have happened. The address was that of Margit Furth, a sister of our aunt Sari. She and her husband lived in Budapest all this time. This was all news to me. I suppose we were not able to, or not willing to contact them because they were living in what was designated as the ghetto. Now that the war was behind us, this was a good meeting place.



I packed up my loot and belongings, which wasn't very much, and said goodbye to the Roths. I had to make several inquiries as I went along because I was not familiar with Pest. It took a couple of hours. There was snow on the ground. On my way, I saw quite a few people leaving the ghetto area. They were hauling their belongings; some of them on sleds, others on their backs. I had the feeling that these people had been through a heck of a lot more than I had.

Finally, I found the address. It was an apartment house, several stories high in reasonably good condition. I went up the stairs and knocked on the door of the apartment. A woman answered, and she guessed who I was because she promptly announced, "Irvinke itt van. " I entered and was led into one of the bedrooms. There were Michael, Mother resting, and Otto in bed.

Now I knew why they didn't seek me out. My Mother was well along in her pregnancy by now. She was into her seventh month and for her to get around in that condition was not the easy, certainly not on snowy slippery streets. Otto lay wounded. He appeared to be in considerable discomfort and in a very foul mood. So I soon made myself comfortable. I presented them with the goodies that I accumulated at the railroad station. That helped to cheer them up a little. Otto was hungry and he suffered a great deal more from hunger than I did.

After I got settled they told me their story. They managed to find a hiding places in an abandoned cellar on Nagysandor Utza, and in some other places. The cellar was used as a machine shop in normal times. There was a very heavy work bench under which they made themselves comfortable. A couple shared the cellar with them. Otto, suffering a great deal from hunger, was highly motivated to go out on the streets in search of food. There were some bakeries still open and he would attempt to get some bread. He also was kind of restless and ventured out for other reasons as well. As my mother tells it, he was suddenly interested in finding a Hungarian/English dictionary to spend his spare time under the bench learning English. On one of these excursions he was detained by a Hungarian Nyilas. He had to leave behind his jacket before they'd let him go. On another occasion, he got caught in a mortar barrage and got shrapnel in his left leg. Bleeding, he barely managed to limp back to the cellar before he collapsed.





They made contact with Margit and her husband after the liberation and moved in with them. Margit, a pleasant woman, was an accomplished poet. She was published in Hungarian before the war. She had one son in the Palestine living on a kibbutz. He immigrated before the war started. She and her husband were very kind to take us in.

They had virtually no food themselves. It became my task, as I saw it, to see whether there was any food to be had in the city. My little brother Michael, now approaching the age of three, was very well behaved throughout the ordeal. He was a quiet little boy. He had yet to say a single word. He was just not talking and who can blame him. He was a late talker and in a way it was lucky for us.

The following morning I decided to do a little reconnaissance around the neighborhood. The first thing I noticed was that on the first floor of our apartment building there was a Russian Army field kitchen. A young man, who was not much older than I, was preparing some food. He was peeling potatoes. I approached him and tried to communicate with him. I indicated that maybe I can help him with the potatoes. He handed me a knife and I started peeling potatoes in the hopes that maybe he'll give me a few. He eventually did. I noticed he had loaves of bread. I convinced him to let me have a little bit of that too.

The city was in relatively good shape although the utilities were not working. Soon there was enough activity to enable people to get some food. One of the first things the Russians did was to open up some of the bakeries. They put the local communists in charge. Almost out of nowhere men with red arm bands appeared. At times armed with a rifle, they controlled various street corners, and directed the activity in the city.

Breadlines began to form. I took the opportunity to participate in as many of them as possible. I contrived a netted shopping bag, that was so common in Europe, and lined it with a handkerchief so that its content was hidden from view. On one particular occasion I tried to obtain more than one piece of bread in a breadline. The breadlines were usually formed on the street and then ended in a courtyard. Within the courtyard was a second line and that's where you got your turn at picking up a portion. Each individual was given one single portion. I needed several pieces for my Mother, Otto and Michael. As the occasion arose, I attempted to make several



passes in the courtyard. On one occasion, the man in a red arm band noticed my attempt to reenter the line the third time. He brutally threw me on the ground and took away my second piece of bread. But that was just one of a few difficult situations. In general, things were improving greatly.

Fighting continued on the Buda side for some time. The Germans held out there through the middle of March. Buda was hilly, heavily fortified, and the Russians were not in any great hurry to liberate it since the city was already bypassed.

The Russian soldiers became a common sight throughout the city. They were generally good natured, although there were difficulties with women and watches. They seemed to have developed a great liking for wrist watches. They would confiscate them. A lot of them were uneducated, illiterate and had never seen a wrist watch. I'd seen on one particular occasion, a soldier who had about three or four wrist watches on his arm, was trying to negotiate for one that was running. He was not aware of the fact that these things had to be wound. There were also brutal rapes we heard about. I, for one, didn't witness any violent acts on the part of the Russian soldiers as they came through the city.

I did notice on occasion that they were collecting able-bodied men for work. They would commandeer stores for the purpose of collecting these men. A soldier would be leaning against a doorpost of the shop and as an able-bodied man would walk by, the soldier would swing him into the shop. After about ten or fifteen of these events, a truck would pull up, and they would put these men on the truck. As I understood it at the time, these people were being used for local work to restore public utilities, clean rubble and get things back to normal. But I did hear some rumors about these men being shipped out of the city to Siberia.

The Russians were looking for German stragglers. On occasion I would see a civilian who would be suspected. A Russian would stop him and if they had bandaged arms or similar wounds, they would have to uncover the wounds. The SS had an arm-tattoo. The suspicion was that some of these SS would try to eradicate their tattoos.

Life of the city recovered to normalcy rather quickly after all the ordeal it had been through. Soon the Jewish community started to organize and communicate. News





spread that if one was of Czechoslovak nationality, or for that matter, nationality other than Hungarian, one should get in touch with the appropriate organizations to be repatriated. The intent was to disperse the population. There was fear of epidemic breaking out. The sooner the refugees get out of the city the better. By the middle of March, or certainly by the end of February, we have decided to look for a way to return to Kassa. We knew that it was going to be again part of Czechoslovakia.

Transportation was problematic. We got in touch with a group of people who were organizing a train that would leave Budapest and proceed in the direction of Czechoslovakia. It must have been early March when we finally departed Budapest. The train was guarded by Russian soldiers and proceeding in the direction of Czechoslovakia. The train made many stops and it appeared to us that it was changing direction. Not knowing what to expect of the Russian soldiers, we got suspicious. As a result, at one of the stops in one small cities we got off the train.

We did have a little money left. We were able to buy some food in the local outdoor market. We managed to get a room near the railroad station. To this day, I remember the specific food items we ended up buying. There was an abundance of sour cream, molasses and bread. Not much else. We would spread sour cream on the bread and pour molasses on top of it. We gorged ourselves on this meal. It must have taken us about two, three days before we managed to find another train. This one was not guarded by Russian soldiers and seemed to have been going in the right direction. There was little information available about these trains as they came along. The train was very crowded. I ended up in a caboose which on Hungarian trains is nothing more than a telephone-booth-size part of the railcar. I spent one night in that caboose being packed in like in a can of sardines. The train was going at a very small rate of speed and would stop often. I will never forget that one night. It reminded me of the stories of the people that were deported to Auschwitz. These people were packed with that kind of density. They had to survive for days like that. In my case it was just a matter of overnight. We managed to get off that train eventually, and the final leg of our journey was made on an army truck. It must have been the last week of March that we finally returned to Kosice.



Once in the city, the first thing we did was to go back to our apartment in the hopes of being able to recover it. We rang the bell, and an elderly woman came out. We told her that we used to live there and we would like to re-establish our residence. Of course she was not particularly happy to hear this. She informed us that this was now her apartment, she'd lived there since last May and all the furnishings were her own. She did let us in to take a look around, the furniture she had was not ours. We didn't quite know what to do next. As we were starting to leave she called to us and told us to wait. She disappeared into the kitchen and soon brought out a large box. She saved a lot of our family pictures in this box. As to why she saved them I don't know. She could have just as easily thrown them out, she didn't. For that we were thankful to her.

We had no choice but to establish residence somewhere else. Through the Jewish organization, already functioning, we found that there was a warehouse full of furniture available for the taking. The warehouse turned out to be my Father's warehouse. The two floors were filled with furniture, collected when the Jews were deported. The man in charge told us that we could pick out anything we needed. We didn't find our own furniture. We didn't find too many complete sets of bedrooms. They were already picked over. We did find a very nice headboard. We searched trying to find the nightstands but they were nowhere to be seen. Then I noticed a couple of large boxes in the corner. I looked in there and sure enough there were the matching nightstands. I realized that the man in charge was probably saving that set for somebody else and was hiding the nightstands. We got that furniture and some additional furniture and set up household on a very nice tree lined street in an upstairs apartment. I believe it was two bedrooms with a balcony around the corner from our Synagogue and not very far from school.

As you recall, my Mother buried some goods in Mr. Weiss' house. The stuff consisted primarily of Aunt Mariska's Persian carpet, my Mother's silver Shabbat candle holders, some silver platters, silverware and a jar containing American dollars. We didn't know at this point what became of Mr. Weiss. People were living in the house and in order for us to get access to do the digging, we needed some people with authority. The local Communists were in control here just as much as in Budapest. The men with red arm bands, some of them with rifles, were the authority. My mother managed to hire a couple of these men. She compensated them for it. Later they tried to "shake" us down by claiming that one





of them has lost his wrist watch while digging. My mother refused the claim. As for the people now residing in Mr. Weiss' house, they were amazed to see what was hidden under the floor!

As we got settled in the new apartment, the big event of Susie's birth was just around the corner. We checked out the hospitals and they were all functioning. Within a short time Susie was born on April 6th, 1945, in the hospital. Susie was the only one of us to be born in a hospital. Everybody else was either born in a birth clinic or at home. She was, I am certain, the first Jewish child born in Kosice after the war.

The situation in Kosice by this time was surprisingly normal. I started to explore the city. I noticed there were bodies hanging from trees on Main Street. Other than that, the city looked normal. There were virtually no visible signs of war, no physical destruction. I tried to find out which friends of mine survived. I found that none had come back.

As time went on, the trains started to roll in from various parts of Eastern Europe. Kosice was a railway center, so that people returning from the various camps would more often than not pass through.

In the spring and summer of 1945, beginning about May and June, a large number of Holocaust survivors came through. We were always hoping that perhaps our Father would also be among them. We had some cousins that arrived and stayed in our apartment. I remember specifically Dezső Kessner, Bözsi's husband from Midszentmihaly. He slept on our couch for a few days. He was completely in a daze not knowing what to do or where to go. Eventually he went back to his home village hoping to find his wife and young boy child there. But of course, he knew better. There were the sunburned faces, heads shaven, some of them still in striped prison garb, getting off the trains. Many of them in a daze, many of them looking for any familiar face. It was very a depressing scene, needless to say.

Little by little international Jewish organizations appeared. Four doors from us there opened a Joint Distribution Committee office. I remember that specifically, because they were handing out clothing and food and I got my first suit with long pants at that office. Actually, I got two suits. I got a brown one and a blue one, made



out of very rough cloth, but they were brand new and fit me well. I also got a pair of new shoes.

Main street was the primary gathering place for the displaced persons coming through. People would walk up and down the main street to meet their relatives or friends. I would go there on occasion in the hopes of perhaps recognizing some of the faces. The only face I was able to recognize from the pre 1944 era was that of the son of Dr. Offner. He survived.

The public school system was reactivated almost immediately. The school administration had the huge task of converting from Hungarian to Slovak. Slovak was now the order of the day. This meant that the entire population had to learn Slovak. As you recall, I was raised and educated in Hungarian. Up to this point Slovak was just simply not spoken anywhere. Now the new rules were that you are not to speak Hungarian. The rule was "Na Slovensku, po Slovensky." "In Slovakia, speak Slovak." If one spoke Hungarian on the street, one could be subject to a fine. I entered public school very soon after our arrival. Surprisingly, everything was well organized. All the children in the classroom were new to me. There were two Jewish kids. Aside from me there was one other, Peter Feuerman. He was the son of a local lawyer who we did not know before 1944. I gathered he had lived in Budapest. They decided to settle in Kosice after the war. I befriended Peter very quickly. There were a few of non-Jewish boys in the class who I also befriended. One of them, a very dark-complected boy, was very bright, and we became good friends. The school was excellent. We had a few Catholic priests involved in the teaching. We all struggled with the Slovak language. By the middle of summer we were able to speak Slovak fairly proficiently, write it and read it as well.

We investigated the situation as to what we could recover from my Father's business. Business activity was still at a very low level. Most of the merchandise that my Father had in his huge warehouse was gone, with some exception. Before departing Kassa, he managed to place a few barrels of valuable paint pigment with one of his colleagues. We were able to recover those barrels. These were a few barrels of ultramarine which was very much in demand at this time. There was some possibility of doing business. As a result, since Otto was not interested in going back to school, with Mother's help, he restarted Father's business.





In the garage, we found the old Tatra. It was still set on blocks. Eventually Mr. Weiss appeared. Mr. Weiss, Mother and Otto decided to make a go of it in the paint business. The business was not prosperous. In the meantime my Mother applied for financial aid to the Czechoslovak government. We succeeded in getting a stipend which enabled us to survive financially.

As time progressed, Uncle Moritz appeared one day at our apartment. As I recall, he would travel from Sečovice to Kosice, about fifty miles by wagon and walking, and would bring us food. The countryside was better supplied with food than the cities. There was surprisingly little shortage of food stuffs by this time. There was some rationing which was really applicable only to things like sugar, flour and salt. Indeed most food stuffs were readily available in the local outdoor markets.

The political situation began to stabilize by this time too. The Czechoslovak government in exile, with Edvard Beneš as President, reappeared from London. First they went to Moscow. They picked up some of the Czech Communists, formed a coalition and established a provisional government council -the Narodna Rada. By this time, the war front was proceeding west at a relatively quick pace. Places like Bratislava were liberated. The big battle for Berlin was beginning to take shape in mid April. The Russian advance was basically on three major fronts. One thrust went past Budapest which is what we experienced. That was the advance towards Vienna. The second thrust went through the Carpathian Mountains, while the third came through the north, from Warsaw on to Berlin.

During the month of April and May, I would go to Main Street and watch a huge situation map on display in one of the store windows. One could see the front changing on a daily basis. The battle for Berlin shaped up towards the end of April and there were two thrusts. Zhukov was converging from the north, and Konev, the Ukrainian general, was approaching the city from the south. The battle for Berlin was horrendous. The Russians took terrible losses. People talked about three, four hundred thousand dead in trying to take the city. The order of the day was that Berlin had to be taken by May 1st to commemorate the celebration of May Day. Stalin instructed Zhukov that the city had to be taken by then or else. As a result, Zhukov spared no human sacrifice to get the mission accomplished. Zhukov's reputation suffered greatly during the Battle of Berlin for this reason. Up



until that time the Russian soldiers respected him greatly. At any rate, by May 1st the Russians were in the city and took it by May 5th.

The last remaining capitol to be liberated was Prague. Prague ended up in a pocket between the Russian advance from the East and the American advance from the West. They agreed upon a demarcation line for American forces at Plzen. They were not allowed to advance any further east into Czechoslovakia. Prague had to wait for the Russians to be liberated. As it happens, VE day came and went before Prague was actually occupied by Russian forces. Prague was liberated finally about the middle of May. One last great drama took place before the liberation.

There was a general in the Soviet army by the name of Vlasov. He was captured by the Germans in the battle of Leningrad. General Vlasov was so disillusioned by the conduct of the war on the Soviet side that he decided to cast his fortunes with the Germans. The Germans offered him a command and allowed him to organize a Russian Home Army. It was intended to come into use, after victory in the East which never came. The Germans never really trusted these Russians and they never armed them more than machine-gun level. They had no trouble getting recruits because the conditions in the prisoner-of-war camps were atrocious. The Russian prisoners were offered good treatment if they volunteered for the Home Army.

This was especially tragic since the Soviets never endorsed or adopted the Geneva convention. As a result, the Germans felt no obligation towards Russian prisoners of war. As the Vlasov army was pushed further west it found itself in Prague. In a tragic attempt to redeem themselves in the eyes of the Allies, they turned on the German garrison. Prague was thus first liberated by Vlasov and then by the Soviet army. Vlasov was promptly arrested, tried and executed in 1946, in Lublanka prison in Moscow. His army, almost to the man, was deported to Siberia and very few of them survived.

There was another tragedy associated with this event. The Allies had an agreement with the Soviets to repatriate all Soviet citizens in the West. All those who were used as slave laborers by the Germans, regardless of the circumstance, were to be repatriated. Many of them, afraid of what's waiting for them, committed suicide. This is a very dark chapter in the history of World War II as far as the United States





is concerned. These people were victims of the Nazis and then they were handed over to the Soviets to become the victims of the Bolsheviks. Hundreds of thousands of people were involved..

There was another figure similiar to Vlasov. Bandera was Ukrainian Nationalist who initially collaborated with the Germans, in the hopes of getting the Germans to accept a free Ukraine. His units were still operating after the war in some of the mountainous areas of Slovakia. They lived off the land and tried to keep out of the hands of the Russian army. And when I was in Humenne a few years later, they would raid the city for food. Bandera escaped to West Germany and was assassinated by the KGB in the '50's. Many of his people died fighting the Soviet army after World War II. They were very antisemitic.

The new Czechoslovak government established itself initially in Kosice. Eventually it transferred its seat to Prague at the end of May. Free Democratic elections were scheduled for the fall of 1946. In the meantime we had given up hope of finding my Father. My mother made contact with our relatives in America. First we contacted Aunt Zara in the Bronx through a Red Cross letter, and asked her to inform the Grossman side of the family. At about the same time Uncle Moritz managed to get in touch with Uncle Isidore in New York. The decision was made, that we should all immigrate to the United States at the earliest possible time. But this was more easily said then done. There were virtually hundreds of thousands if not millions of people interested in doing the same thing.

Germany was full of displaced persons (D.P.'s.) These were people who, unlike the Soviet citizens who were forced to repatriate, did not repatriate to places like Poland, the Ukraine, and the Balkans. These were primarily Jews, survivors of the Holocaust, who perhaps first went back home. They soon returned to the West in hopes of getting out of Europe. Many of them didn't even bother to return to their home towns because they've seen their family and loved-ones die in the concentration camps.

The move was on to get out of Eastern Europe. To make Aliyah to Palestine became the order of the day. Most people that we knew were interested in going to America, however.



The first thing to do was establish a trail of required documents for the passport and then an immigrant visa to the United States. For that purpose it was necessary to document the fate of our Father. A whole new industry sprang up at this time for getting documentation prepared for immigration. The key document that we had to get was Father's Death Certificate. We needed documentation to establish the place and time of death. There were people who would act as witnesses for the deaths in Auschwitz. Since that was the easiest type of document to get, we decided to proceed with the claim that Father died in Auschwitz after being deported from Kosice in 1944. Of course this was not true. We knew that he did not go to Auschwitz, but for the sake of expediting matters through the bureaucracy this was the best route to take.

We hired Mr. Feuerman, my friend's father, to do the legal work. First he got us the pension. It was about 1400 Czech crowns. Eventually he got us the passport. We got the quota number for our visa to the United States. To obtain a visa under the immigration quota was a lengthy process. First, there were limitations as to how many people could get visas per year. Secondly, one had to obtain a guarantee from someone in the United States. This meant an affidavit assuring the government of the United States that whoever gives one the affidavit will be responsible for the immigrants' sustenance. Uncle Isidore kindly provided us the affidavit. He also made arrangements for us for transportation from Prague to New York. That was no small matter. In order to get the American Visa one had to show that one had means of transport. This was long before the jet age.

The Czechoslovak government was re-established by mid 1945. They issued a new currency and in the process eliminated excess funds. One could only exchange a fixed number of old currency for the new. Since we didn't have any money to speak of, this was not a problem for us. As the election took place, the Communists won overwhelmingly. At that time they were extremely popular. After all, the country was liberated by the Soviet Army. They seemed to know what they were doing. They were well organized and they were promising social justice. In neighboring Hungary, the Communists won also. Soon the Communists took complete control of the government there and did away with all pretense of coalition.

Under the leadership of Beneš, in Czechoslovakia there was a coalition of four distinct parties. The Premier was Gottwald. He was a long-time pre-World War II communist who was in Moscow during the war. Beneš appointed the son of the





founder of the Republic, Jan Masaryk, as Foreign Minister. Jan Masaryk had an international reputation and he was a logical choice to be in charge foreign policy. Beneš attempted to steer a neutral course between East and West. He had no illusions about the Soviets. By this time Stalin double-crossed him on Ruthenia. Ruthenia, which included Uzhgorod and Mukachevo were part of Czechoslovakia before World War II. As the war ended, Stalin promised Beneš that there would be no changes made in this arrangement. Uzhgorod and Mukachevo would remain part of Czechoslovakia. As the Red Army advanced, there appeared a "spontaneous demand" by the population of Ruthenia to become part of the Soviet Union. The claim was, therefore, that Stalin had no choice but to accept the will of the people.

The Hungarian communist leadership was almost exclusively Jewish. Rakosi, who was the Premiere and the party boss, was a Jew. His top echelon, including Rajk, were Jewish. They initiated a rule of terror soon after the war. They arrested all the Nazis and Nazi sympathizers which was natural enough. But they also arrested most of the liberal democrats. Many of them found themselves sharing a jail cell with the Nyilas nazis of World War II. It was a real tragedy. Hungary had an opportunity to go the way of Czechoslovakia at least for a while. But this did not happen.

The Poles were unceremoniously taken over by the Soviets. A Soviet general was appointed Polish Defense Minister. Again, the Jews played a major part in post World War II communist Poland. Many of the leading Communists were of Jewish descent.

Our life in Kosice at this time was fairly normal. I was attending school and was studying in preparation for my Bar Mitzvah which was going to occur in April, 1946. We did have some additional relatives that survived the war. The cousins from Tokaj, the Engel's, Irene and her kids, survived in Budapest. She came to visit us. She was already back in business in Tokaj and doing quite well. They were also making plans to depart although it wasn't clear to me at the time whether they were planning to come to the United States or elsewhere.

Also our cousins in Bratislava, Tercsi Lipshitz, her husband, and two children, were alive and prospering. They had all converted to Catholicism at the beginning of the war. Tercsi came to visit us in Kosice. Just as she was visiting one afternoon, (I'll



never forget this) baby Susie was in her crib, out on the balcony. Little Michael was hanging around the crib, and the next thing I heard was Susie gagging. It turned out that Michael was feeding her raisins. The raisins got stuck in her throat. Mother was talking to Tercsi indoors at that time, and didn't know what was going on. I yelled out. They both came running out to the balcony. Mother had a good presence of mind. She turned little Susie upside down, gave her a few whacks and all the raisins promptly fell out of her throat. It was a close call. Michael was just trying to do what he though was right, feed his little sister.

Life was good in Czechoslovakia at this time. But a tragedy occurred soon after Tercsi's visit. Tercsi's husband was a successful engineer and plant manager for a Swedish firm. The firm had a plant located in Bratislava, manufacturing electronic equipment, lightbulbs and things of that sort. After the war Lipschitz was very much sought after by the Czechoslovak government as well as by industrial groups who were looking to expand in Czechoslovakia. As I understand it, he got involved with Narodna Rada trying to help the organization of the new government. He was also offered a top job in Sweden. On one of his business trips to Vienna, he had a horrible auto accident with a Russian truck. He died of his injuries. That was the great tragedy of the day. Tercsi never recovered from it to this day. Rumor had it, and I don't know if there was any proof of it, that it might have been an assassination. We'll never know the truth.

I was taking Hebrew lessons for my Bar Mitzvah. Unfortunately, there weren't going to be any relatives to celebrate with me. Mr. Weiss took it on himself to instruct me in the Haftorah and I managed to learn it quite well. When the day came, the main sanctuary was not yet opened. We ended up having the Minyan in the Rabbis study. It was a very small room. I was especially hurt, because Uncle Moritz did not come. He did send me a Swiss wrist watch which was very nice. But I would have preferred to have him with me. He might have thought that I was ill-prepared for the Haftorah, but my Haftorah went well. Afterwards, my Mother organized a little party for me. Three of my friends and I had ice-cream in the living room. That was the extent of my Bar Mitzvah. I was serious about religion in those days. I put on Tefillin every morning. Before going to school I'd get out on the balcony and I'd do my praying in front of the whole world.





The gymnazium took up most of my time. My grades were acceptable but not great. I still had some difficulty with the Slovak language. It wasn't that I couldn't speak or read it, but most of my effort was going into that aspect of it, the courses were directed towards the learning of the language. Additionally, instead of studying Latin, the High Schools were now instructed to teach Russian. We had to memorize Russian poetry. The Russian language, I thought was a very rich beautiful language. Somewhat akin to the Slovak, some of the words are common and some of the grammar is similar. I was the only one in the family who was studying Russian.

During this period Otto was busying himself with the business. Mr. Weiss traded in the old Skoda for a new one. We were now in late 1946. The economic situation was improving. People were able to make a living. There was a black market but it had to do primarily with cigarettes. The cigarette black market was huge and a lot of Jews made a lot of money that way.

The Soviet army withdrew from Czechoslovakia soon after the first elections which must have been in early '46. The next scheduled election was going to be in early '48. The communists made a mess of governing. They lost a lot of credibility and popularity by 1947. The Cold War was beginning to be felt all over Eastern Europe. Hungary was already completely under communist control. Rumania and Poland were taken over. East Germany was established as an entity though not recognized as a sovereign government until later. Czechoslovakia was an island surrounded by Communist countries.

Austria was partially under Russian and partially under Western Allied occupation. At about this time we had got a visitor from America. It was a young man, a cousin of ours, Zoli Grossman. His father immigrated to the United States with his family in 1937 from Kosice. Zoli had a childhood sweetheart in Kosice so when he got to Plzen with the U.S. Army, he decided to come and visit. We all met him, and of course being an American soldier he was a king among paupers. He was a great sight to see with his prosperous confident demeanor and great uniform. He visited his childhood girlfriend but nothing came of it. The girl was very disappointed. We did not see any Allied soldiers other than Russians in our part of the world. Once the Russians withdrew, the Czechoslovak army took over.



The paperwork for emigration was proceeding very slowly. We knew that it was going to take us some years before we can depart. However, by early 1947 it appeared that we may be on the verge of getting our visa for the United States, so the decision was made to give up our household in Kosice. A move to Prague would put us near the American consulate. We had hopes that within the next two or three months we would be able to get the visa and depart soon thereafter.

We sold most of our belongings and took a train to Prague. Mother had some friends and acquaintances who were able to put us up for a short time. Our first apartment, shared with some other people, was in one of the newer suburbs of Prague. In Bubeneč we shared a very nice modern apartment. We shared it with a Jewish young man and some of his friends. He was a correspondent for the Soviet newspaper Pravda. He was always dressed immaculately. I don't know where he spent the war, but I had the impression that he might have been in the Soviet Army.

We stayed there for a while. By then it became obvious that we were a too optimistic on the departure date. We had to move out of that apartment. Mother had some cousins from the Deutch side of her family who were living in the old town adjacent to the famous Charles bridge. They were sharing an apartment that was out of the Middle ages. It had no running water, no bathroom facilities except for one community toilets on each floor. The kitchens was very minimal. It was a good sized, on the second floor, consisting of four bedrooms and a kitchen. We were on the bank of the Vltava River (Moldau), the river that splits Prague in half. It's a beautiful rustic rapid flowing wide river. We shared a room with another young lady, as I recall. We were very limited in space but we were content because we were amongst very congenial roommates. The Deutch boys, distant cousins of Mother, were occupying a couple of the other rooms. They all had young families. There was a boy about Michael's age by the name of Usuka. The husbands were engaged in black marketeering of cigarettes and they were doing very well at it.

I was uprooted, we all were. My major task in those days was to take care of Susie and Michael as Mother was making the rounds around town. She made contacts with other friends of hers from Ungvar. These were survivors of her generation who had social life and connections for getting papers needed to emigrate. Mother had a little bit of a social life in this regard.





Prague was a beautiful city then. The summers were mild and cool and the river Vltava was really a great sight. On occasion I would rent a row boat and go out on the river by myself. I didn't have any friends to speak of because I was new in town. The language was Czech and I spoke only Slovak. Gradually I managed to pick up the Czech as well. I didn't have any difficulty communicating but I was very isolated. On occasion I'd go to a movie. Movies were mostly American and Russian with subtitles. On the big square Vaclavske Namestie there used to be a movie theatre open twenty-four hours showing newsreels. All they would show was newsreels. I was very interested in world events and I would see newsreels from throughout the world. I did not attend regular school in Prague.

The visa process was very slow. As summer was coming to a close we decided that I should start attending school. As 1947 was drawing to a close we were faced with another major problem. In 1948, Otto was going to reach his 18th birthday which meant that he would be of draft age for the Czechoslovak army. What to do if the visa does not come in 1947? It could be a real problem for us. So we decided to get Otto out of the country on a student visa to England. He departed in the fall of 1947.

I ended up in a small town near Ushorod, back in Slovakia with cousins whom I really didn't know. Cousin Sari, her husband, her daughter Judy, and her three brothers-in-law shared a big house in Humenne. It was really just an oversized village in a rural area of Slovakia. Thus in the fall of 1947, I found myself on a train going to Humenne and not knowing how long it's going to be before I'll return to Prague and depart the country. Mother, Michael and Susie stayed in Prague.

I started the local high school. By a huge coincidence, I ran into a cousin of the boy I met in Bratislava during the war. Imi Mason and I became instant friends so at least I had one friend in Humenne. Winter closed in on us very quickly, it was a very severe winter. Although the cousins were all very nice to me, I felt very alone and homesick. The school was hard on me. I was taking tough courses. I could hardly wait to get the visa and go to the United States.

The previous summer while in Prague, I enrolled in an English course at the Berlitz School of Languages. I'll never forget it. It was upstairs in one of the buildings on the corner of Vaclavske Namestie. The teacher was a young woman who lived in



England with her husband during the war. That's how she learned English. She was not a terribly good teacher. I don't think she was trained in the teaching profession. She did her best and I did pick up some English skills. she taught us a few English songs, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." My English skills at this stage remained very limited.

In Humenne, one day I was paid a surprise visit by one of the Deutsch cousins that used to live with us in Prague. He was going through Humenne for whatever reason. I surmised that he was on one of his trips to sell black market cigarettes. When he saw me, he pulled out a big roll of bank notes and handed it to me. I gave it to Sari as I just didn't quite know how to handle the situation. I gather he was trying to give me a gift and all he could think of was cash.

Sari's husband and brothers were in the hide business. They would collect raw hides from the farmers and resell them to the hide processors. They had a warehouse full of raw, still dripping hides. There was still a big shortage of salt. Salt was more valuable to the peasant than money. They would come into Humenne to deliver hides. They would get paid in small sacks of salt. As a matter of fact, food stuffs such as butter and eggs and other goodies were readily available for just a few pounds of salt. I gather salt was scarce because mining ceased for a while and railroad transport was limited.

In late November of 1947 I heard from my Mother in Prague that the visa from the American Consulate was forthcoming. I left Humenne to stay with Uncle Moritz, Sari and Lilly for a few days in their home in Secovce, which was about eighty miles to the west. From Secovce I was transported to Prague. I must have arrived in Prague in early December. We were all very excited to depart. The arrangements for the transport were still pending.

The way out of Prague involved overland international transport. Remember there were no airplanes in those days to consider. Uncle Isidore in America managed to get in touch with a Swedish transport company which also arrange for our sea transport. The route leaving Prague entailed going through the German border at the U.S. zone of occupation, turn north through Denmark, enter Sweden and then sail from Sweden to New York. This meant that we had to get visas for crossing several borders.





Our passports were originally issued on April 21st, 1946 when we were optimistic about getting the American visas sooner than we did. As a result the passport had to be renewed, not an easy task to do in those days. The Danes and the Swedes would not issue visas unless our passports was current. Thus the extension of the passports was mandatory. We managed to get that done by November 12th, and we got the Danish visa permitting us to cross Denmark into Sweden. The U.S. Visa finally came in on November 27th, 1947. Our visa numbers are as follows: 1614 Rose, 1615 Irwin, 1616 Michael, 1617 Susie and 1618 was Otto.

We now had the means to proceed. Thus on December 28th, 1947, in the early morning hours, a caravan of three buses assembled on the main square in Prague. I remember the morning as if it were yesterday. It was a very cold day. I'd never seen buses this large before in my life. A small crowd gathered around the buses. As people started to board, and one got up the stairs, the crowd could catch sight of every individual entering the bus. As my turn came, and as I got to the top of the stairs, I heard a shrill from the crowd. A woman was shouting my name, "Irvinke, Irvinke." She rushed up and getting a hold of me, hugged and kissed me. I recognized her as Mrs. Kaufman, the mother of my good friend from Kosice. She survived the camps, but lost both of her sons and her husband. I had to tear myself away from her as I entered the bus to let the others board.

Many years later, my Aunt Zara was visiting us in the late '70's in Los Angeles. My mother dropped her off at the airport, and as they were standing in line for check-in they heard two women speak Hungarian nearby. My mother suggested that perhaps Aunt Zara could try to sit next to this woman in the plane and thus have a pleasant trip home. As it happened, Aunt Zara did manage to sit next to this woman and they struck up a conversation. The woman was telling Aunt Zara how she's returning from Australia on her way to Israel where she resides, and how she was originally from Hungary/Czechoslovakia. And at this stage my Aunt Zara remarked that she was visiting the Grossmans in Los Angeles, who are originally from Hungary/Czechoslovakia. Before Aunt Zara could say more, the woman said sobbing, "And how is Irvinke." She was the same Mrs. Kaufman that saw me board the bus on Vaclavske Namestie.



It seemed like eternity for the buses to get loaded and get ready to go. The engines were idling and as I looked around, I noted that there were no children other than us. There were no children on the other buses either. Most of the passengers were older people, mostly couples. The buses started to move slowly, turned left on Vaclavske Namestie. I said goodbye to the beautiful city of Prague where we spent many pleasant hours roaming its narrow streets.

We arrived at the German border and entered the U.S. Zone of occupation at Post Number 2 at Waldhaus on December 28th, 1947, the same day we left Prague. We proceeded through Nuremberg turning north toward Hamburg. As we travelled we saw the tremendous devastation of cities and towns. There was very little left intact, it was a very depressing sight. We stopped in Hamburg as I recall, or in that proximity, to spend the first night. All accommodations were prearranged. I remember in the Hamburg area I saw a lot of kids running on the streets. There was a lot of trading in cigarettes. Some of the passengers who had cigarettes were trading them for Leika cameras and such. Generally the countryside was very depressing.

The next day, on December 29th, we entered Denmark at Krusaatold Kontrol Number 40. The entry note on our passports indicates "one adult, three children and \$40.00." That's what it says! Otto had his own passport. We spent the night of the 29th in a small town in Denmark. I was very impressed by the accommodations. It was a beautiful little inn, very clean. We were served excellent food, lots of dairy, cakes and such.

The next day, being December 30th, we continued our travel through Denmark turning northeast. We left Denmark at Helsingor crossing the bridge onto Sweden. From Helsingor we turned north and got to Goteborg the same day. Goteborg was the sea port from which our ship was going to take us to New York. We stayed in Goteborg till January 3rd of 1948, at which time our ship, a Swedish-American liner was due to depart. We had nice accommodations in Goteborg and had a little time to go sightseeing. I remember, we ended up in a shopping district. We looked in through the various display windows and saw things which were really new to us. As I saw my first washing machine in a window in Goteborg. We went through the town and we ended up in a public cafeteria. We were surprised to see how everybody was drinking milk. We were very impressed by the cleanliness of the city, how well it was laid out. The weather was very cold.





On the morning of January 3rd 1948, we finally boarded the Drottningholm. It was an old ship and we heard that this was to be its last Atlantic crossing. It was going to be scrapped. But it was in very good condition and due to the generosity of our Uncle Isidore we were booked for First Class. All of our travel companions were in the Third Class. They were down in the hull, whereas we were top side and had excellent accomodations.

The ship departed on time and we were really excited being on board an ocean liner. We have never seen the ocean up until this time let alone an ocean liner. The ship appeared to be huge. It had all kinds of amenities, lounges and bars. There were four levels, and I had a great time just exploring the ship. On occasion I would even get lost. We had a very elegant cabin up on top. There was a steward attending us with anything we needed. Our needs were very meager. The dining room for the first class passengers was most elegant. We felt out of place. Most of the people traveling first class were wealthy Swedes and Americans, who dressed up for dinner. We felt a little bit out of place with our below-average garb. We didn't have any dinner jackets to go with the scene.

The food was strange to me. They were serving delicacies such as lobster, crab and shrimp. I'd never seen any of these foods let alone taste them and I found them completely unappetizing. They resembled insects of some sort. But there was plenty of other food to eat. There was a lot of fresh fruit to which we were not used to in the middle of winter. I remember when I got served with a half a grapefruit, I didn't really know what it was. We were familiar with oranges and tangerines but for some reason we never saw a grapefruit. We knew about bananas and I enjoyed that. It was quite an experience just seeing the food and the strange people around us.

I was not able to find any friends to play with, as all of the ship travellers were adults. We were the only children on the ship. The weather turned bad about half way out on the Atlantic. It was a very severe storm, not unusual that time of year. The crew roped off all the external decks because the waves were battering the ship. Many people got sea sick, as I recall. I got sick somewhat myself. I think Otto was quite seasick and my Mother as well. Little Michael, I don't think, had much trouble



with that. He was very good, always smiling and well behaved. Little Susie, at this time two and a half years old, was not at all troublesome either

Aboard ship we passed time with various games. People were playing cards a lot, and in the evening, dancing. On one occasion the crew set up a horse race, driven by the throwing of the dice. Someone gave me a five cent piece. I bet on one of the horses and the horse won. They exchanged that five cent coin for another coin which was smaller than the one I gave them. I didn't quite understand what was going on here. I examined the coin, and it said, "One dime." I didn't know what a "dime" meant. I soon spent the dime buying Hershey bars at the Commissary. That was my first experience with American money. The weather finally calmed and we were told that we will be in New York harbor on time.

On the 13th of January 1948, very early in the morning, the whole ship was up. It was a very cold foggy morning. I noticed tug boats being attached to the ship as it slowed. Gradually, we were being pulled into the Hudson river. It remained quite foggy, but as the sun was starting to break out on our left, one could barely make out the silhouette of the Statue of Liberty. And so it was that in the morning hours of January 13th, 1948, we arrived in New York harbor.

As I conclude, I would like to say a few things that are still on my mind. I don't know why we survived when so many others didn't. But whenever I hear people talking about the Holocaust, I think of myself as somewhat of a fraud. Compared to what to others had to go through my experience was insignificant. Needless to say, I was fortunate being spared the fate of many others. There's no question that had I been I caught in the web of the German death machine, I would not have survived. That is a certainty! Children of my age had no chance of survival. The fact that I was not caught in the "machine" is due primarily to the efforts of my Father and Mother. They were innovative and refused to give in to defeat. They continued to struggle against all odds. The great tragedy is that Father did not survive, neither did my little brother Sanyi. Our losses were horrendous! We also lost Grandfather, Grandmother and a number of cousins, uncles. and aunts. Our survival was dependent, to a large extent, on the assistance of some very kind and gracious people. I don't know that I would be here today were it not for the Mr. and Mrs Garscar. What about the the kindly Gentile neighbors who lived next to us on Nádor Utca? I don't even recall their names! What about Mrs. Roth, my saviour in





Budapest? What about the woman we met on the trolley in the midst of the seige? What about the peasants who helped us cross borders in the middle of the night? All these people contributed to the miracle, some with a great deal of personal risk.

The fate of our Father is still not certain, although we know that he did not survive. His death certificate states that he died in Auschwitz, which is incorrect. According to Gilbert's book, 50,000 Jews were force-marched from Budapest to Vienna between November 2nd and 8th in 1944. Of those, about 10,000 perished on the way. These dates correspond to the date my Father was taken from the prison cell. As I recall, at one time my Mother said something about a man who allegedly saw him on this march. We'll never know the truth.

I would like to finish with a quote from the book, *Hassidic Tales from the Holocaust*, published in recent years by Yaffa Eliach. In the preface of that book, the Rabbi of Bluzho makes the following comments. "When Pharoah restored the chief butler to his position as foretold by Joseph as an interpretation of butler's dream, he forgot Joseph. Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him." Genesis 40:23

Why does the Bible use this repetetive language? It is obvious that if the butler forgot Joseph, he did not remember him! Yet both verbs are used, "remembering and forgetting." The Bible, using this language is teaching us a very important lesson. There are events of such overbearing magnitude that one ought not remember ALL the time, but one must not FORGET them either. Such an event was the Holocaust.





Rozsi and Herman Grossmann  
circa 1928





December 19 1928

Dear Moritz,

Now at last, three weeks ago we received your telegram and today your then-written letter according to which you no longer protest and , I hope, in the meantime your receipt of my letter you will be completely satisfied. Your memory does not fail you, Herman is of middle height, like Father, handsome, brown, glasswearing guy, and when it comes to his integrity, I am glad that you know of that too. Extremely diligent, a good businessman, and has a beautifully managed wholesale paint business and precisely the preoccupation with the business prevented him from finding the right girl and now he is unendingly happy that he found me. As I already wrote, only 10-11 years are between us because his birth certificate does not correspond to the truth, because at the time his now-deceased father reported him older to avoid the military draft. He already has a cute little apartment and I hope that nothing, but nothing will be lacking for our happiness with G-d help. I am taking Hershel with me, and if he will have the will , then he will be able to acquire an excellent trade since Herman will give him very opportunity to become a first-class businessman. As we are going to honeymoon in Vienna he will be in the business and I hope he will want to stay and work for his future with G-ds help. Mariska has been here since Sunday, and she too is getting to like Herman , we were together in Kassa this week. I am hurt by the knowledge that in the middle of all these expenses you are not supportive of Father who, sadly, with his counted pennies is trying to provide all the things which are necessary for such an occasion. May the Almighty give him a thousand times the pleasure from his children till 120.

I am endlessly in pain thinking of the fact that you will not be present on Wednesday the 19th at my wedding. But I beg the Almighty for help to bring about the pleasure of our meeting again.

Write to me to Kassa at the business address;  
Hermann Grossmann, Kosice, Zrinyi utca 20.

With endless love, hugs, and numberless kisses to dear Mildred and with Zlatku.

Rozsi



Az egész 3 hetes esztendő megkapott hely,  
szorgalmat és ma ugyanakkor int. leveles  
mely szerint már nem tiltakozol és perem  
időközben megkapott levelem után teljes m  
lepeccsével gondolk. a rövidesen J. sepietsepe  
megkötendő felelősségre. A memoriad nem  
csak, Herminia közelemes, olyan min  
tprusa, csinos. Hanna nemcsak fin, c  
amir. szoliditást illeti örülök hogy te is t  
jól. Roppant szorgalmas, jó kerekedő,  
nyilván becsesített felelősségekkel  
és igen isletti elfoglaltságát gátolva meg c  
abban, hogy egy igencsiner megfellelő lea  
rátaláljon és most néptelenül boldog hogy  
rántalált. Mint már vittem <sup>ca. 10-11</sup> év  
közöttünk, mert amolyan vi. adatai m  
felelnek meg a valószínűs, annak idején  
megboldogult ide. Több, hogy majd a hat  
ságot híkenülhöz idősebbnek jelentette  
Hár egy csinos kis lakásunk is van hál  
és remélem hamar de hamar sem fgy  
háromzóni boldogságunkhoz a jó J. sepiet  
guel. Herminia napánál vissza is ha  
akarat lesz benne, akkor nagyon szeren  
bellet, a hitvány szamáran, a k. Hermin





Kosice March 12th 1930  
Zrinyigasse 18

Dear Moritz,

I am just now getting to answer your congratulatory letter. Thank you for the good wishes and may the Almighty give us health and joy in raising my child. The joy of parenthood is something you already know more than anyone else. I would rather paint you a picture of little Otto, that is what we call the darling, and his Hebrew name is Jehuda Arye, after Herman's deceased father. Ottoka is a little blue-eyed, brown-haired little guy, indications are that he is totally Herman. He was skinny when he was born but now thank G-d he is developing nicely. He takes up my whole day and often I am also busy at night since I feed him myself. I would be happy if Moritz and Mildred and the little cousins could see each other. but unfortunately this is just a wish. Daddy, Mariska, Francis and Armin, thank G-d at least participate and we can only see you in our minds eye. Nowadays Daddy is largely getting ready to (see) you, may G-d give him a lucky trip and may he have a lot of joy with all of you together. I can imagine how you are counting the days. My poor dear Moshe, you never thought that you will be so far away for so long but now with the help of G-d you will see your Daddy. I can imagine how much it means and may G-d help you with a lot of joy. I will send photographs of Otto. Happy Easter holidays and lucky and joyful reunion with your Daddy I kiss your dear children, Mildred and yourself- your sister.



Grossmann & Co. Košice

Verkauf u. Materialwaren-Großhandlung

Telefon 968.

Brünnener Postsparkassa Konto 120.470.

Prager Postsparkassa Konto 65927.

Telefon 968.

Draga domi! pst

Košice, 930. III. 12.  
Zrinyigasse 18.

Look most pitok hossa, nagy k. gratuláció  
szelvedre házasságára. Köszönöm airov jó-  
kívánságaitokat adja a jó I nagy egyetemen  
is örömlen melegen fel gyermekem kedvű.  
A szülői örömet nem hall eestelen eláttat  
ast alkalommal jöttök talán szeri sen  
ismeni. Inhabb lefeatom a kis Ottó, egy dringja  
a drágát is helyer neve felide tije, a Hermann  
megszaladpalt apja után. Ottika kis kék szemű  
barra hajja füccsok, a jeler szemű szép Hermann  
kis szavanyka volt mikor született most már  
hála J. népem fejlődik. Széltőlét szép nap





Dear Zara,

Rose gave me the letter to add to and since I have time now, I am writing to you. As you are informed through the newspapers we live in difficult times here. The uncertainty hopefully will not last long as the great powers took on the role of mediating and soon things will be settled- I hope for the best.

Engels letter (uncle Julius) arrived in Galszees (uncle Moritz) in which he writes how we should sell everything and come out; but this is not easily attainable, because mine, as well as my other brothers' assets are all out (invested) and liquidation will take a year at best. We shall see what the future brings. In any case I wish and I want that my boys could live under a calmer sky and if I were to act it would be only in the interest of their future.

As to the conduct of the business, the previous (ly mentioned) events had great consequences (regarding the neighbor) which continue. Construction, which looked promising this season, completely stopped and my business is lacking.

Otherwise T.G. we are safe. Sunday we had two engagements in the family. My sister's daughter and my brother's son are each engaged and I visited them this week. Lilly (now Polk) has prospects for a very good marriage.

Father (grandfather Hillman) probably wrote you. Glad to hear that your husband Bernard is planning to come here. At last I will get a chance to know him. Events here must not keep him from coming, because whatever happens an American can move freely.

Best regards to you, Bernard and the children and kisses -  
your brother-in-law

Hermann

P.S. For the sake of reassurance, I will mention that I am sending father promptly on the 1st of each month Kc 300. This month more was needed; he wrote that there were extraordinary expenses.

## GROSSMANN & COMP.

ULTRAMARINOVÁ MODRA - BARRY - CHEMICKÉ ZBOŽÍ

KOŠICE

TELEFON: 2978

Sokorv útca v Brno: 120470

Košice, 3.V, 1938

Zrínyiho ul. 18

Kedvas Szerénke !

A levelet Rószika nekem adta hogy továbbítsam, és minthogy most időm is van, úgy írok Neked. Mint a lapokból informálva vagy, itt komoly időket élünk, a bizonytalanság remélhetőleg nem soká tart mert a nagy hatalmak vállalták a közvetítő szerepet és rövidesen elfog intéződni, reméljük hogy a legjobban. - Engeltől is érkezett Gálszeésre, egy levél, melyben írja hogy adjunk itt el mindent és utazzunk ki, de ez nem olyan könnyen megvalósítható, mert úgy az égyém mint a többi testvérek vagyona kint van, és egy likvidálás ha jól megy egy évig tartana, De meglátjuk hogy mit hoz a jövő, mindenesetre kíváncs vagyok hogy fiaim nyugodtabban, és egy nyugodtabb éghajlat alatt éljenek, és ha cselekednék, úgy csak azoknak a jobb jövő érdekében. - Az üzlet menetéről az utóbbi események, nagy kihatással voltak, /értve a szomszédot/ mely most is tart, - Az építkezés - mely ezidén nagynak ígérkezett - teljesen szünetel, és a szakmára kihat. - Egyébként h, I, megvagyunk, vasárnap a családkban két eljegyzés volt, a nagynihályi hugomnak a leánya és a terebesi bátyam fia jegybe léptek, én hygmihályon voltam. Lillinek is van most valami nagyon jó parti kilátásban. Apa biztosan megírta Neked. Örvendek a hírnak hogy a k, Bernát férjednek szándékában van ide jönni, legalább alkalman, esz őt is megismerni, a viszonyok őt semmi esetre ne tartsák vissza, mert bármely történet, is egy amerikai szabadon mozoghat.

Teged a k, Bernátot és a gyerekeket a legszívélyesebben üdözl és csókol sógrod

megnyugvás képpen megemlítem hogy Apának 300,- tovább tudom-e honapba minden hó-l-én pontosan többet kellett, mert 114





92.953/1941.

II. b.

szám



*Állampolgársági bizonyítvány.*

A rendelkezésemre álló hiteles adatok alapján bizonyítom, hogy a  
Zemplén vármegyei Lasztóc községben az 1890. évi ja-  
nuár hó 28. napján született GROSZMAN HERMAN kassai  
lakos magyar állampolgár.

Budapest, 1942. évi július hó 21.-én.

A miniszter rendeletéből:

*Levitzky*  
miniszteri tanácsos.



5

5

33581/1942

1942. B. M.

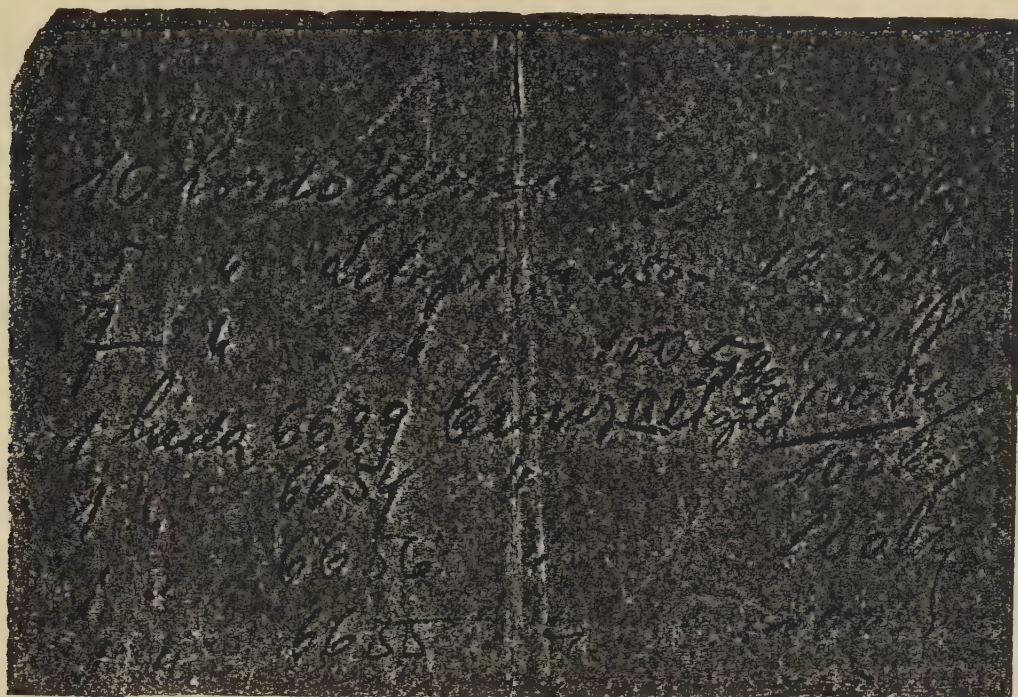
Certificate of Hungarian Citizenship

1942 AUG 22

*Levitzky*







|    |            |                      |         |
|----|------------|----------------------|---------|
| 10 | barrels of | UltramarineBlue      | 1000 kg |
| 5  | "          | Letapon @ 250        | 1250 kg |
| 7  | "          | " @ 100              | 700 kg  |
| 1  | case       | 6689 Crown-- Gold    | 100 kg  |
| 1  | "          | 6654 "               | 100 kg  |
| 1  | "          | 6656 "               | 100 kg  |
| 1  | "          | 6655 "               | 100 kg  |
| 1  | "          | 6657 Aluminium Brown | 60 kg   |

4.1944 (merchandise hidden  
from the Nazis by  
Grandpa Grossman)





Am. kir. rendőrség budapesti főkapitányságának fogház- és toloncügyosztálya

30526 f.k. Hl.

## Szabaduló-levél.

Letartóztatásban volt

Grossman Hermanine

in Hillman Rose Ungvar

születési 1906 éves, mai nap

szabadult s utasítást kapott, hogy 8 nap alatt rendes lakást és foglalkozást  
szerezzen, ellenésetben el fog toloncoltatni.

Budapest, 1944. évi

ho. -n

fogházfelügyelő

Budapesti Hírlapnyomda. 45737.

The Royal Hungarian Police Headquarters Budapest  
Prison and County Jail Section

30526

### RELEASE FORM

Detained under arrest was Mrs Herman Grossman aka  
Rose Hillman of Ungvar, born 1906, was freed  
today and instructed to obtain within 8 days  
regular housing and gainful employment lest be  
rearrested.

Budapest November 20th 1944

Prison Supervisor





OSOBNÍ POPIS - SIGNALEMENT  
ОПИСАНИЕ ЛИЧНОСТИ - DESCRIPTION

Manželka - Femme  
Жена - Wife

Zaměstnaní / Profession  
Занятые / Занятые  
Occupation / Occupation  
Rodiště a datum narození / Lieu et date de naissance  
Место и время рождения / Место и время рождения  
Place and date of birth / Place and date of birth  
Občitel / Visage  
Лично / Лицо  
Face / Face  
Barva očí / Couleur des yeux  
Глаза / Глаза  
Colour of eyes / Colour of eyes  
Barva vlasů / Couleur des cheveux  
Волосы / Волосы  
Colour of hair / Colour of hair  
Zvláštní známení / Signes particuliers  
Особый приметы / Особый приметы  
Special peculiarities / Special peculiarities

DETI - ENFANTS - ДЕТИ - CHILDREN

Jméno / Nom - Имя  
Stáří / Age  
Datum narození / Date of birth  
Sex / Sexe - Пол  
Podpis / Signature  
Podpis / Signature  
Podpis / Signature

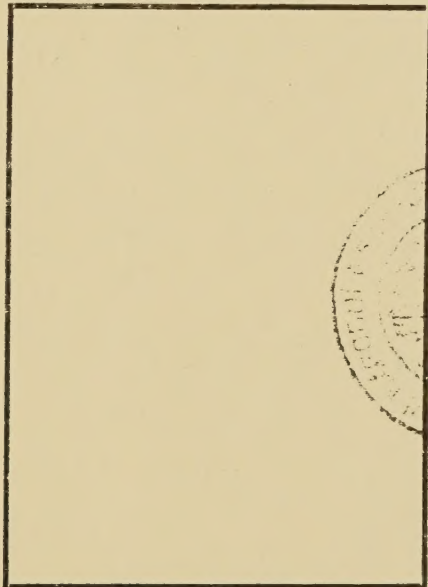
Fotografie majitele - Photographie du titulaire  
Фотография владельца - Photograph of bearer



Podpis majitele  
Signature du titulaire  
Подпись владельца  
Signature of bearer

Рижина Бродячий

Manželka - Femme  
Жена - Wife



Podpis manželky  
Signature de sa femme  
Подпись жены  
Signature of his wife







